Lilith

THE INDEPENDENT JEWISH WOMEN'S MAGAZINE

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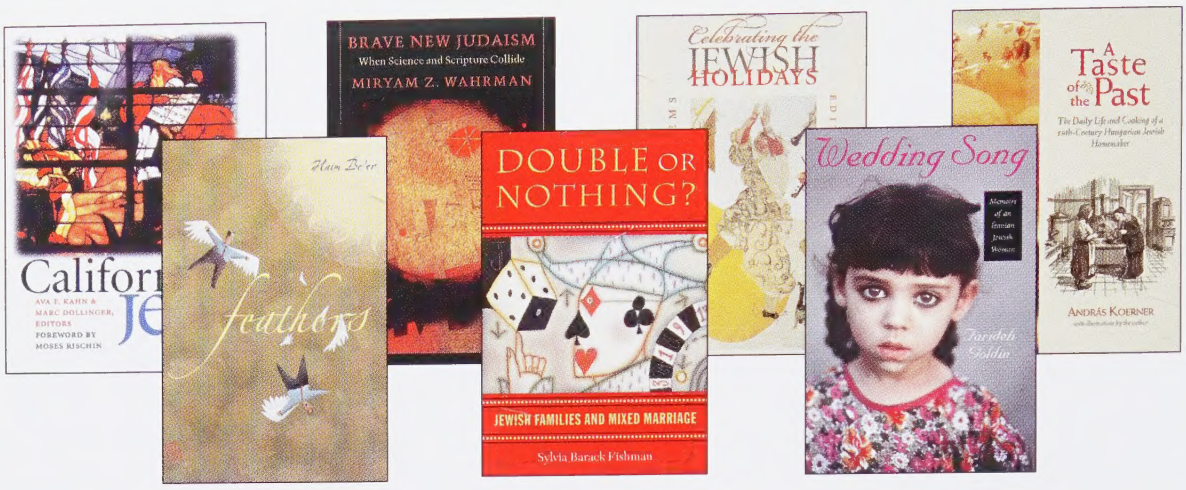

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© JOAN ROTH

Remember those bat mitzvah twinnings with deprived Soviet Jews? Now our twins are here, in their 20s and 30s. Listen in on them in the LILITH office as they talk to **Rachel Kranson**—and each other—and hear first hand what young American Jewish women from Russia really think about their mothers' careers, their Jewish identity, and other American Jews.

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Why is this magazine called LILITH?
In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

—from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, 23a-b

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From the Editor

I've been revisiting a lot of assumptions, spurred by two articles in this issue. The first is Sarah Blustain's *cri du coeur* about her struggles to reconcile motherhood—its delicious pulls and its draining exhaustion—with her assumption, from elementary school onward, that her career trajectory would be the same as that of her male peers.

In years gone by I've written and spoken about how wonderful it would be if the Jewish community would be a leader in changing personnel policies and child-care arrangements as the outdated model of the compulsory stay-at-home mom was replaced by the two-career family (or by a family headed by a mother with a job outside the home: a one-career, female-parent-only family).

But this wouldn't be nearly enough. We (women and men and children too) need a two-pronged approach—communal and personal—to the burn-out-or-opt-out dichotomy presented in the media as the only choices available to women who have careers and also children.

It's wearying to think that the strong stance taken by Jewish feminists decades ago still requires reiteration. Nevertheless, we'll grab the bullhorn and say it again: Jewish institutions and organizations—synagogues, community centers, federations, Hadassah, and the rest—have an obligation not just to decry falling Jewish birthrates but to assess and respond to the needs of people who might be having those babies.

We need not only Jewish day care centers in synagogues, where there is much space going unused most weekdays. We really need Jewish institutions to model family-friendly personnel policies. Jewish federations and the alphabet soup of Jewish agencies, think tanks, and so on, could spawn a revolution (and a lot of goodwill inside and outside their walls) if they were to implement—across the board—flextime, job sharing, consistent family-leave policies, on-site day care. These are the physical, structural changes, and I used to think this might be all we'd need. Wrong. We need re-education as well. An attitude shift, not just a split shift, or the "second shift" that women work at home.

The change in attitude has got to be up close and personal. I don't just mean those diaper-changing areas in men's bathrooms, now ubiquitous in airports and other public places, thank God or the women's movement. I mean more. Here's a radical thought: Jewish organizations and institutional employers create workshops for fathers, encouraging them to see themselves as part of the solution, rather than living—unintentionally, we hope—as part of the problem in so many families. This really *is* the unfinished work of feminism: the personal and the political.

How about showcasing the solutions families with young children have worked out? Families where each parent willingly assumes some of the career damage raising children may entail. Families who have discovered, created or evolved ways of defusing, in real ways not just lip-service, the pain, anger, anxiety and confusion that can hang like a cloud over the experience of raising children when one parent takes the career "hit" Blustain feels like a body blow. How about modeling these families' solutions at national Hillel conferences, at young couples' events at synagogues, at Lamaze childbirth classes sponsored by JCCs?

The point is to change the assumptions. Women's power suits of the 1980s—navy blue skirt and jacket, white blouse, silk bowtied scarf at the neck—have given way to less rigid sartorial styles in the office, but a lot of rigidity in gender roles—in the workplace and in many families—is still there. Maybe some of this is in the chromosomes. A nursing mother's breast milk lets down when she hears a baby crying. OK. But should the fact that one parent is magnetically pulled toward her child mean that she (and not the baby's father) will lose sleep and lose momentum at work? Read and ruminate.

Women's "power suits" have softened up. So why are rigid gender roles still with us?

The second assumption-busting piece here is about young Jewish-American women who were born in Russia. We invited to the LILITH office for an evening of talk a small (and, as it turned out, lively) group in order to find out a little about a cohort that seemed to have slipped between the cracks.

"I never even knew she was Russian until her mother called one day and I heard them talking in another language!" said the Ivy League college buddy of one of our respondents. It has been 40 years since the beginning of the Soviet Jewry movement in the West, almost a quarter of a century since the first significant numbers arrived in the U.S. and Canada, and 13 years since the exodus following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Time to find out about the lives of a new cohort: smart, savvy, and making their way in America almost unnoticed. Media attention and the Jewish social-services have largely been focused on elderly babushkas living in poverty at the far edges of Brooklyn, clever criminals of both the gangster and the white-collar varieties, or on the problems of families whose post-immigration lives have been marked by alcohol abuse, violence and the disruptions caused by status slippage in a new world. Until now, nobody has asked young women from this community what their *own* lives and dreams hold.

Though they had never met one another before, their laugh-

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ter when they recognized the common possessive behavior of their un-American mothers and the power of the older generation's Russian "set-up network" proved how easily the bonds of landsmanschaft are forged. Join LILITH in listening in on their delighted and frank conversation.

The cover of this issue and the poem within were created by artists who are part of the same cohort—Emilya Naymark and Marina Rubin. This special focus on Jewish American women from the FSU has been made possible in part by the generous support of **Mildred Weissman**, who has long been a friend of LILITH, and by **Shirley** and **Milton Gralla**.

Some other recent support merits special notice. LILITH has won a grant from the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, supported by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, to help make the magazine available on tape for people with visual handicaps, and to help upgrade our website. Targum Shlishi, an **Aryeh** and **Raquel Rubin** Foundation, has made a grant to LILITH also to be used, among other things, for improving the website. Please visit: www. Lilith.org. Much praise is due our web designer, Simcha Shtull; she has helped LILITH's web material look as lovely as the print version of the magazine. One remarkable aspect of this website is that soon you'll able to access the contents pages of all the issues of LILITH magazine ever published!

The website is only one of the ways we are expanding LILITH's reach. Another is through an audience-development campaign we are launching with the generous support of LILITH board member **Yvette Gralla**. Please join Yvette by introducing others to the unique pleasures of LILITH magazine.

—Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor-in-Chief

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Kol Ishah:
The Voices of Women.

Traditionally, the **voice** of the Jewish woman was **not to be heard** in public, lest it arouse men. **No more.** These pages are for news about Jewish women, in our own **strong voices.**

CLEAN WATER, CLEAN SEX, CLEAN UNDIES

Florida's "Condom Grandma" speaks out on AIDS prevention

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, senior citizens comprise 14 percent of all AIDS cases. In Florida, which has one of the largest senior populations in the nation, the percentage in some counties is even higher. And one concerned citizen is taking action: **Miriam Schuler**, 85. For the past seven years this energetic great-grandmother has been volunteering for Broward County's Senior HIV Intervention Project—SHIP—in a very visible way. Schuler distributes condoms and literature about AIDS prevention from tables set up in libraries and senior centers. Moreover, she also demonstrates how to use the condoms. At first, she says, she felt shy talking about such matters in public. But now she is known around town as the "Condom Grandma."

She has become something of a maven on the subject of safe sex. "Picture this: a woman is older, and alone. She needs a man," says Schuler. "But she was brought up during a time when you only used condoms to prevent pregnancy. But she has no idea who a date has slept with." Schuler knows several older women who contracted AIDS during unprotected sex. Now, AIDS prevention has become her mission.

"I always have condoms my bag, and I give them out. At the dentist, the podiatrist. Yesterday, I distributed them at the beauty parlor," Schuler told LILITH. She keeps a bowl of them on her coffee table. When my single friends come, they help themselves."

If somebody tells her that they don't need any, she asks them if they have children, or grandchildren in college—"where, you know, they experiment."

"If they say yes, I tell them, when you send your grandchildren a check—and what Jewish grandparent doesn't send grandchildren a check once in a while," Schuler laughs—"also put a condom into the envelope." *—Alice Sparberg Alexiou*

As Free as the Water in New Orleans

When I arrived in New Orleans just out of college in August of 2002, with six others from Green Corps, the Field School for Environmental Organizing, I knew we'd have to hit the ground running. In only six weeks, the New Orleans' Sewerage and Water Board would vote on whether or not to sell the city's water system to the world's two largest water companies, companies with a track record of dumping raw sewage into the Mississippi River, contaminating drinking water in other cities and driving up local water rates.

The seven of us were armed with skills we had learned in a month-long training program in grassroots organizing, and the conviction that water should be a basic human right—as a common resource that we all depend on. Beyond that we had a couple hundred dollars, some contacts in the labor community, and less than two months to block a billion-dollar bid.

Even before we found a place to live, we hit the streets and began gathering signatures and community volunteers. We phoned local organizations until we had built a coalition of over 60 churches, neighborhood associations, labor unions, and environmental organizations, all committed to protecting New Orleans' water. Our volunteers pounded the pavement, generating over 5,000 public comments to the water board. They got neighbors to put signs on their lawns; overnight our blue "Vote NO on the bids" signs sprung up all over the city. We held press conferences every week, turning out dozens of citizens to water board meetings and public hearings. We even utilized a creative New Orleans-style technique: informal parades where we drove decorated cars through the city, throwing Mardi-Gras beads and using a bullhorn to urge people to call the mayor. Within weeks, our issue had generated front-page coverage, and after a month and a half of bleary-eyed strategy sessions and non-stop grassroots organizing we blocked the largest water privatization effort in the history of the U.S. What made the biggest impression on me is that grassroots organizing, person-to-person, actually works. *—Orli Cotel*

Orli Cotel, organizing at the grass roots.

For more information about Green Corps, the Field School for Environmental Organizing, visit www.GreenCorps.org

Second-Hand Sara

The piles of clothes fit neatly into the trunk of my car. So do the cartons filled with coffee mugs. But when it comes to the crates of Kleenex and the boxes of miniature shampoo bottles, things get a little tight. **Sara Cohen** juggles things around a little. Finally she slams my trunk lid shut. This load is just one of the many that people deliver to Cohen's door every week. This week mine contains a few weird items, like the mud-brown sake cups. But Cohen, 59, accepts anything—dental adhesive, antacid tablets—that can make life a little easier for the homeless of Chicago.

Sara and I head for the Irving Park Food Pantry. As requested, I have contributed grocery bags for our trip there. I ask why Sara had said that the bags absolutely must bear the names of neighborhood supermarkets. Cohen responds: "You'll soon see."

Sara Cohen

At the food pantry, a young mother furtively helps her little girl to a brownie from the platter set invitingly on the counter. Other visitors, with gritted teeth and eyes fixed on the floor, head for the tables loaded with cereal boxes and cans announcing themselves as "gifts of the U. S. Government." The young mother chooses each item with care, hefting its packaging to calculate the maximum number of servings she can stretch from it. Finally, her "shopping" complete, she slides all her items into a couple of the plastic grocery bags that Cohen has just delivered, takes her daughter's hand, and heads for the door.

The mother raises her eyes to glance to left and right as she steps tentatively into the street. It's now mid-morning, and the street is thronged with shoppers, several of whom carry grocery bags identical to hers. If any also contain "gifts of the U.S. Government," nobody can tell. Her head comes up and she strides on.

Cohen's donations flow in from many places: friends, or friends-of-friends, or factory rejects which find their way to her through letters she has sent, or phone calls she has made, or notices she has tacked to temple bulletin boards. She is also not above asking for packs of tissues or cough drops when she mails out her holiday cards.

Every sweater or dish is catalogued in a set of well-thumbed cards stowed in Cohen's "office," an orange plastic box that sits on her kitchen counter next to the telephone. A second set of index cards, even more thumbed-through and curling at the edges, holds a never-ending series of wish-lists from agencies, respite centers and soup kitchens. These boxes have sat there for 30 years, ever since Cohen first noticed the desperate poverty among her many homeless clients at the Chicago-based tuberculosis sanitarium where she worked.

Cohen doesn't expect accolades for her work, but like everyone else, she enjoys a little appreciation. One especially prized award is an Orrefors crystal bowl, which she received in 1990 from the Raoul Wallenberg Committee. She was delighted to receive it, but true to her own feisty form, spoke her mind while making her acceptance speech. "Would **Raoul Wallenberg** have felt that we are doing enough to help the poor?" she demanded of her audience.

She herself thought not. To women all over the country, she offers simple suggestions: "Look in your local yellow pages," she urges. "Pick out a couple of agencies not too far away from you, and call them to see what they need most." Next, she says, pick a manageable project, like the plastic bags for the food pantry. "I care about how many homeless people there in the huge city of Chicago, but I don't focus on that. If I did I'd never manage to help anyone at all." And she'll tell her dinner hostess: "You don't need the wine or flowers that people will bring as gifts. Tell them to bring toilet paper and soap, or toothpaste, for the homeless shelters."

—Gillian Wolf

kol ishah

Divan, as in Couch

In "Divan," her quirky documentary film about coming to terms with her Hasidic roots, **Pearl Gluck** takes us on a trip to Hungary in search of a fabled couch once owned by

her family, on which generations of famous rabbis slept. Though she has separated herself from the Hasidic community in which she was raised, Gluck has said that making the film has provided a way to reconnect with her family. "Divan" is currently making the rounds of theaters; check nationwide listings at: www.zeitgeistfilms.com

Orthodox Feminists—Definitely No Oxymoron

This year's theme of the fifth Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) in New York was *Zachar v'Nekavah:* Man and Woman, God Created Them. Orthodox feminists are deeply committed to rabbinic power, and that is precisely why they engage in the struggle to gain rabbinic approval for change within the boundaries of *halakha*, Jewish law. Some have charged that Orthodox women who are feminists are destabilizing the traditional patterns of Jewish family life. But most are women with university degrees who are nevertheless often willing to put their careers on hold to raise families—with an average of four to six children.

Which brought us to the subject of how Orthodox education impacts on girls. I live in London. When **Elisheva**, my seven-year-old daughter recently celebrated her Hagigat Humash—a festive occasion where all the Grade 2 children are formally presented with their own Bible—parents received a booklet. It read: "Moshe received the Torah from Mt. Sinai and handed it over to Joshua, and Joshua gave it the Elders, and the Elders gave it to the Prophets and the Prophets gave it to the Men of the Great Assembly. Since then, the Torah has been passed from father to son until the Redemption will come."And the mothers? And the daughters? Where do they figure in this history lesson? For the past 25 years, pioneering educators such as **Chana Henkin**, **Malka Bina** and **David Silber** have transformed education by enabling women to have equal access to the Talmud and ensuring opportunities for funded full-time extensive study. But gender-sensitive Orthodox teachers are the exceptions. Young girls are still being given messages that the Torah does not belong to them. The JOFA conference asked about boys as well: if they are not taught to recognize and grapple with the issues, how can they begin to relate differently to the women in their lives?

And then there was *hakhnasat orhim*—the mitzvah of welcoming guests into your home. It used to be straightforward: you invite, they accept, you cook, they eat, you chat a little, they chat a little, they leave, you go to bed. Ah, not in the world of the Orthodox feminist. **Miriam Schachter** of Riverdale said that everybody in her family takes turns to say the Kiddush prayer over the wine at the Friday night meal. However, when it is her turn, and there is a guest whom she knows will feel uncomfortable if she recites Kiddush, she defers to her husband. "But," she asks, "what sort of message does that give my son and daughter?" Does the mitzvah have to include a selfless act by the host? On Sukkot, in addition to the seven male 'Ushpizin' guests symbolically invited into one's own sukkah, Miriam hangs pictures of the seven prophetesses—**Sarah**, **Miriam**, **Deborah**, **Hannah**, **Avigail**, **Huldah** and **Esther**. But she is tired of the sniggering guests who make some sort of comment. She keeps her mouth quiet for fear of embarrassing her guests, but inside she is raging. Can an Orthodox woman's home be her castle?

Another JOFA discussion zeroed in on Orthodox Jewish women as sexual beings and single mothers. The Orthodox community has its fair share of sassy, smart and sophisticated women who have managed to combine their Orthodoxy with their successful professional, secular life. They're looking for husbands who are just as integrated, but they can't find them. Several Orthodox women in their late 30s have adopted children or used a sperm bank to get pregnant, willing to defy convention and risk marginalization. Other unmarried participants expressed frustration at being infantilized or made invisible within their community, which has a taboo against acknowledging premarital sex, even for women in their 30s and 40s.

Finally, the conference explored the "Ornithology of Religious Women." A not-so-subtle decoding system in the Orthodox community classifies Orthodox women solely on how they are dressed, encouraging assumptions (often false) about social attitudes, religious commitment, political affiliations, and family size. For example, bobby socks, denim skirt and baseball cap equals married in Teaneck, New Jersey, while a *shaytel* [wig], brightly colored appliquéd sweater and sensible shoes must mean married in Brooklyn. Interestingly, covering one's hair and wearing pants were always regarded as an inherently contradictory dress code. However, I have been fascinated to watch how this specific dress combination has evolved into a new dress code for Orthodox feminists. At the JOFA conference, I was struck by the number of women who covered their hair with hats or scarves *and* wore

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pants. Americans friends suggested this was partly about feeling comfortable and more modest in pants, but also a statement against the prevailing norm of categorization. These women want to confuse expectations in order to engage people with the real issues such as promoting women's education, halakhic options to increase women's participation, and on-going inequity in Jewish divorce law. There is a lot of work to do, and we have to take men on the journey. Leave them behind, and we risk a generation of young boys at odds with the aspirations of their sisters, and with no clue about fashion.

—*Sally Berkovic*

Letter From Paris

The email arrived inviting me to present a paper, this past March, on American Jewish feminism at the enticingly named seminar *Femmes et Judaïsme dans la société contemporaine* (Women and Judaism in Contemporary Society) to be held in Paris at the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme. This jewel of a museum was under construction the last time I was in Paris and its dynamic director, **Laurence Sigal**, is a close friend. Clearly, I had to go.

Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme

I was met at Laurence's home by her 10-year old daughter, **Faustine**, who presented me with a hand-wrought map to the Hotel de Ville and instructions to take the number 38 bus, which should be named: "The bus to remind you how beautiful Paris is." Walking into the stunningly restored Musée in the Marais, the visitor enters a place which will remind her at every corner that being a Jew in France is *different*. Seeing the striking statue of Dreyfus in the courtyard and an exhibition entitled "To be Jewish in Paris in 1938," I knew I was in another world of experience and learning.

At the session launching the conference on Saturday night, **Simone Weil**—among the best-known women in France, former Minister of State, President of the European Parliament and assimilated Jew—gave the opening presentation, attributing many of her values to her Jewish upbringing. (I wondered, though: Why was a *man* chairing the opening panel?)

Sunday morning's panel on Women in Synagogues and Rabbinic Courts featured **Liliane Vana**, grand-daughter of a famous Yemenite rabbi. She is self-taught, learned, quotes sources in Hebrew and rabbinic opinions with total ease. I found myself wishing only that her progressive and highly intellectual discussion of what is law and what is custom would guide Orthodoxy today.

The film "Trembling Before G-d" sparked a discussion challenging the apparent need to have a separate gay Jewish community, "and isn't that just a New York phenomenon?" Suddenly, a portable microphone was in my hand, and in front of a packed house, I began, in French, to explain the filmmaker's perspective on gays in an Orthodox community and how these struggles are not at all unique to New York.

I felt compelled to respond to two lesbians, one in her 20s and one in her 60s, who seemed to think that the film was about uptight gays and lesbians in New York who didn't know that they could be openly Jewish and gay, "like we are in Paris." These women somehow had missed that the film is about pain, alienation and marginalization from the Orthodox Jewish community that gays and lesbians experience—regardless of the country they live in.

My little explanation on this matter was only part of the learning, which cut both ways. Some of the lessons: Women in France got the vote only after World War II, and there are still few women in Parliament today. France, now with the largest Jewish population in Europe—700,000—has only one ordained female rabbi, Reform (termed "Liberal" in Europe) Pauline Bebe, who studied for ordination in London. There is only one woman's Talmud study group in France. At only one synagogue in Paris, Conservative, a girl can be called to the Torah to become a Bat Mitzvah. There is one Jewish GLBT organization in Paris, Beth Haverim. Despite its gains, brain, and feminist energy, the conference did suggest that, like Jacques Brel, patriarchy is alive and well and living in Paris.

—*Jill Vexler*

kol ishah

Ruth Gruber

The Institute of International Education (IIE) has announced the creation of a chair of the Scholar Rescue Fund in honor of journalist and activist **Ruth Gruber**, 93. In 1944 Gruber, who had studied in Germany and witnessed the Nazis' ascent to power, helped to bring 1,000 Jewish refugees to America. Gruber later told her story in a book, *Haven*, which became the subject of a television miniseries.

Getting Younger Women into Politics (Not Just into the Voting Booth)

The Women Under Forty Political Action Committee supports all female candidates running for office. Their goal is to get women into politics while they are young, regardless of party affiliation. This year, the PAC is supporting 10 candidates. For more information: www.wufpac.org.

kol ishah

Israel's Nightingale

Israeli singer and songwriter **Chava Alberstein**, 56, has been called Israel's **Joan Baez**. Both women often sing out about peace, about the futility of cycles of violence, and about being an outsider. "End of Holiday" (Rounder Records), Alberstein's 54th album, is her first collaboration with her husband, **Nadav Levitan**, who

wrote the lyrics. They draw on stark and poignant images of life in modern Tel Aviv. In the title song, crowds of Rosh Hashanah celebrants reluctantly leave a beach at the end of the holiday to return to their everyday lives of work and worry, while prostitutes stroll back to the beach to work.

In another song, a newly Orthodox girl ambivalently returns to a cafe to solicit donations from her old, still-secular friends. A third song with a gypsy melody describes an illegal foreign caregiver who knows only two Hebrew words: *yehiyeh beseder*, it will be okay. During her U.S. concert tour Alberstein received the **Mordechai Gebirtig** Lifetime Achievement Award in Music from YIVO. Besides singing in Hebrew, she continues to put Yiddish poetry to beautiful music.

—Naomi Danis

Palestinian and Israeli Women Confront Gender Issues—But Not Each Other

In December 2003, a week-long conference entitled Gender: Order and Disorder, took place successively in Tel Aviv, West Jerusalem, and Ramallah. Israeli and Palestinian women passionately addressed issues common to both. Omnipresent in the background was the central reality of every woman's life in the Middle East: the influence of the Palestinian/Israeli crisis upon their identity, aspirations, opportunities, their frustrations, and their tragedies. But no Israeli woman faced any Palestinian, nor vice versa. For although the conference was open to the public, in today's political climate, Palestinians from the occupied territories are unable to travel to Israel for any conference, and no Israeli would dare appear in Ramallah.

Thus no Palestinian heard Tel-Aviv University sociologist **Orna Sasson Levy** present her research, which turns on its head myths about the role of the female soldier in the Israeli army. No Palestinian viewed "Detained," the powerful film by **Anat Even** and **Ada Ushpiz** about the emotional burdens Israeli society places upon the widows of its fallen soldiers. No Israeli heard **Rana Nashashibi** of Birzeit University speak on Israeli violence and its effect upon Palestinian women, or **Hind Khoury** present the economic importance of gender order upon Palestinian reconstruction, or journalist **Tahseen Yaqeen's** personal account of how gender became her issue.

The only participants who were able to hear both sides came from Germany, where the conference had been organized by Professor **Christina von Braun**, a cultural historian at Humboldt University in Berlin. Prominent German scholars also attended and presented their papers throughout the sessions.

Looking back upon the experience, Professor von Braun declared, "The most important part of the conference was—for us—the meeting with the Israeli and Palestinian women. We all came home very deeply impressed and with the feeling that we have gone through quite an intense 'schooling' on the conflict situation of Israel and Palestine. No other topic could have led us there as deeply as that of gender."

But an iron curtain of silence has descended between Palestinian and Israeli women. Their respective struggles regarding gender order are waged in the shadow of their primary allegiances to nationality, ethnicity, and religion. Perhaps if they agreed to participate jointly in such a conference abroad could they learn of the similarities and differences in their societies' attitudes toward gender, and thereby begin to bridge the vast gap that separates them.

—Helen Schary Motro

The Rising of the Women

"Once upon a time, there was prejudice toward women. But, with some exceptions, I can't imagine that's true today," a male Federation CEO told **Shifra Bonznick** as she was conducting a study of gender bias in Jewish Federations. The study, released in January, documents that not one female holds a top Federation executive position in America's 20 largest Jewish communities.

The study was sponsored by United Jewish Communities (UJC) and Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community (AWP). Bronznick said that despite the unflattering light that the study has shone on UJC, the organization, to its credit, has made it a point to distribute the results to the over 150 Federations they represent around the nation. This time, Bronznick says, UJC is really committed to change.

So what's keeping women from career advancement? Bronznick found that Federation leadership is a "leaky pipeline:" the lower in the ranks the position, the higher the representation of women. As a result, women are excluded from the decision-makers network. Bronznick said that almost every woman interviewed for the study felt the effects of the "old boys'" network.

"How does information about available jobs get distributed and how do names of potential candidates get distributed? Guys sit around in a room and think of names, and the guys think of guys' names," said one senior female professional interviewed. (The study does not name names.)

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The study also found problems among women working within Jewish organizations. Tensions often exist between full-time volunteers and working female professionals. Other women may feel uncomfortable advocating for women lest they themselves lose standing in the community.

In addition, women's leadership skills aren't recognized and a perception exists that women place their family needs above their careers, contributing to the bias embedded in the system.

Clearly, the study shows how much Jewish federations still need to do in order to level the playing field for women. But Bronznick is hopeful. She points out that some of the recommended changes are already underway. For example, she said, UJC's next General Assembly, in which people from all over the country convene, will include a large number of women in prominent positions. AWP also wants to launch a pilot program for increased flexibility in the workplace for people with families.

—*Miriam Stone*

For a copy of the study, contact mail@betterorg.com.

Gay Marriage, Civil Disobedience

As conservatives continue to their push for a constitutional amendment to prohibit gay marriage, Rabbis **Sharon Kleinbaum** and **Ayelet Cohen** of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in Manhattan, the world's largest gay and lesbian synagogue, have called on clergy of all religions to sign a statement that affirms their commitment to officiate at same-sex marriages. "With clergy being prosecuted for simply solemnizing marriages for gays and lesbians, we must all be willing to stand up for what is right and just," reads the announcement on CBST's web site. So far more than 200 rabbis have signed the pledge.

Rabbi Kleinbaum and others point out that **President Bush** has injected religion into a civil rights issue, thereby muddying the already murky waters of the debate. "What we're talking about here in New York City and across the country is civil marriage," Kleinbaum told the newspaper The Jewish Week. The right for two homosexuals to marry, she said, is a basic civil right.

The split in the Jewish community over this hot-button issue is also being played out in the Jewish press. In February, **Gary Rosenblatt**, editor of The Jewish Week, wrote in an editorial that in the case of "gay and lesbian lifestyles," Jewish and American values are incompatible. "There is more to being a serious Jew than embracing the goals of liberal America," Rosenblatt wrote. That prompted a polite but impassioned rejoinder from Rabbi **David Ellenson**, president of Hebrew Union College. Judaism, wrote Rabbi Ellenson, "is an expansive and pluralistic interpretive tradition that has permitted rabbis throughout the ages to allow changed contexts…to inform them."

In related news, a growing grassroots movement is advocating that straight couples who want to marry hold out until homosexual couples have the same right to marry as they. In the Winter 1995 issue, LILITH published a new ritual for a wedding ceremony written by **Deborah Eisenbach-Budner** in which the [heterosexual] couple spills out a few drops of wine from their kiddush cup saying "We will only feel a sense of wholeness when same-sex couples are also able to enjoy the legal, social and religious privileges that are being extended to us on this holy day."

—*A.S.A.*

For information: www.unmarried.org.

Eve Ensler in Cairo

When an amateur theater group staged Eve Ensler's "The Vagina Monologues" last February at the American University in Cairo for three successive evenings, it attracted crowds and raised money for Egypt's first battered-woman shelter, WomensEnews reports. But local women's organizations said nothing, and kept away. Cast members also told the WENews reporter, Christopher Walker, that they feared reprisals from family or even police for participating in Ensler's play, a diatribe against violence towards women that openly explores such topics as masturbation and rape. Still, one young woman told him, "It is important for us to do this because women in Egypt and in the Gulf area don't ever speak of what they want."

kol ishah

Letter from Berlin

The recent international conference on anti-Semitism, held here in Berlin, my current home city, knocked me off balance. What was I to make of Jews from around the world convening in the German capital—the very city where the Nazis mapped out their planned genocide of European Jewry—to ask for help in combatting the menace of "new anti-Semitism"?

Clearly, anti-Semitism brings Jews together. But the reasons to come here are far more profound. Germany opened its doors to Jewish immigrants after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Since then its Jewish population has more than tripled, now numbering about 105,000. Even if right-wing extremism remains a problem in Europe, anti-Semitism is such a taboo in Germany that politicians risk losing their careers over it. No one believes this scourge can ever be fully removed, but Germany's determination to remember the Holocaust and protect its strong democracy are exemplary, and American Jewish leaders know it.

That is why it was most appropriate that German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer offered Berlin as the venue for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) second confer-

European Jewish Students: *Against* Anti-Semitism and *For* Strengthening Fragile Intergroup Bonds at Universities

Arielle Herzog heads the Jewish Student Association of Geneva, Switzerland. "The situation is tough," said the 24-year-old granddaughter of former President of Israel **Chaim Herzog**, "Students are insulted, there is anti-Semitic graffiti, Palestinians set up a 'check-point' in the middle of the university. People sometimes refer to Israel as a Nazi state and say that Sharon is like Hitler."

How to respond? Herzog came to Berlin in April to share her experiences with peers from around the world. Their meeting took place at the Jewish Museum of Berlin. Organized by the World Union of Jewish Students, the European Union of Jewish Students and the Federal Association of Jewish Students in Germany, it preceded an historic two-day conference on anti-Semitism in Europe that brought major Jewish organizations to the German capital. In the end the OSCE issued a declaration committing its member countries to improving the monitoring and combating of anti-Semitic crimes. It also condemned the use of criticism of Israel for the purposes of spreading hate.

Arielle Herzog

It remains to be seen whether the declaration leads to concrete measures. But while the leaders are talking, the students are on the front lines. At Leeds University in England, students **Amy Sampson**, 19, and **Jardena Lande**, 21, helped organized events in which they used "gimmicks" like "More humus and less Hamas" or "Fighting freedom, not freedom fighters," to draw other students into learning more about Israel.

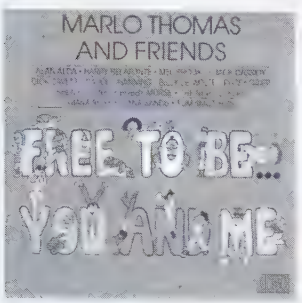
Anja Doroschuk, 25, of Kiev, said her Jewish community organized a 16-day interreligious camp where different ethnic groups learned about each other.

Arnow Finkelstein, 24, said his Jewish student group in Vilnius is organizing Israeli dancing with Christian groups. In Geneva, Herzog's group "does demonstrations, conferences, and we speak to people about what Zionism is: it is the movement of national liberation for Jews, and it is not at all exclusive," she said. "When you start speaking with people, they don't have any arguments," said Herzog. Lande said she, too, is "optimistic. We do have connections to the Islamic society; we are very, very friendly with them and have interfaith events. We have to see the positive and the negative," she said.

—Toby Axelrod

Still Free to Be...

Thirty years ago, five women came together to start a revolution from within. Their fellow fighters were going to be young. Really young. Boys and girls as little as three, four and five. "We wanted to put to death the notion of masculinity and femininity being prescriptive," said author and activist **Letty Cottin Pogrebin**. To wage war against the tyranny of gender stereotypes, they would use stories and songs that told children they were free to be and grow up to be anything they wanted. The project was the brainchild of TV and movie star **Marlo Thomas**, who'd found that all the books on her niece's shelves were the same "garbage" about woe-begone princesses and dashing princes that she was still trying to "get over" as an adult. To change that, Thomas pulled in feminist icon **Gloria Steinem**, author **Francine Klagsbrun**, Sesame Street writer and producer **Carol Hart**, and Pogrebin. Together they produced "Free to Be...You and Me," a children's recording and book that have become staples of progressive American culture and of the feminist movement.



All five women recently gathered for a panel discussion at the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan to celebrate the recording's 30th anniversary. As they looked back on their revolution, Thomas recalled that in the 1970s, ABC nearly pulled the plug on the "Free to Be...You and Me" TV special because of "William Wants a Doll," a story (and song) that teaches boys that it's good to be soft and nurturing and play with dolls, because one day they'll grow up to be fathers. "They thought we'd make every boy in America homosexual," Thomas said.

Throughout the evening, Klagsbrun stressed how far we've come. When her grandson listens to "No One Likes Housework" now, the idea that men don't do it is utterly perplexing to him. From the audience, Klagsbrun's daughter, a doctor, rose to say that her son recently asked her, "Mommy, can men be doctors too?"

Still, no one was arguing that the revolution was complete. Asked what "Free to Be... You and Me, Part II" would look like, Klagsbrun suggested that working grandmothers be included. Thomas talked about the show she'd made in the 1980s, "Free to Be a Family," which celebrated single-parent, multicultural and stepfamilies. A sign of how times have changed, what they hadn't thought to include, she said, were families headed by two mothers or two fathers. Pogrebin bemoaned the steps backwards we've taken. In the 1970s there was a cadre of elementary school educators who believed in challenging gender-stereotyped play. Today, she said, those initiatives are seen as "too expensive or too politically correct."

But when questions were opened to the audience of reverential 30-somethings who had absorbed "Free to Be...You and Me" as children, the answers were less satisfying. One woman, who had recently left the workforce to be a full-time mother, wondered why the burden of domestic labor and child-rearing still fell so heavily on women's shoulders. Steinem's answer—that women don't hold men to high enough standards—sounded borderline blame-the-victim.

Another woman, who had followed the path of "Free to Be's" Princess Atalanta, exploring the world instead of marrying young, also sought advice. The story of Atalanta tells girls they are sure to live happily ever after, whether they marry the prince or choose not to. But now in her early 30s, the woman looked at her recently married and mommied friends and felt unsure of her choices. "If you think it's hard not to get married today, try not getting married in the '50s," Thomas responded. "If you haven't found a man to be your soul-mate," Thomas added, "women are having children without them." What Thomas glossed over were the significant questions of single-parent emotions and economics, and the reasonable desire, even of liberated women, to be cared for, protected and loved.

For a moment, I—33 and unmarried—was irritated by their impatience. And then, to my surprise, I was motivated by it. Here were women who were unusually defiant, so—naturally—they were impatient with those who were, perhaps, not equally so. Their defiance had changed gender relations in our country, and I was grateful for it.

—Rachel Blustain

Letter from Berlin (continued)

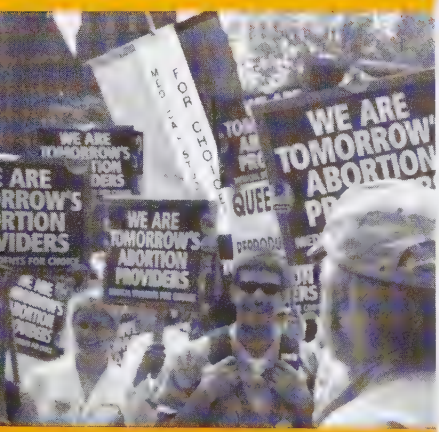
ence on anti-Semitism in less than a year. But the "Berlin Declaration" that emerged from the conference—calling for better monitoring of anti-Semitism and condemning the abuse of Mideast politics for anti-Semitic purposes—needs to have teeth. For example, how does one confront the problem of anti-Semitism among young Muslims, a group that is subject to discrimination across Europe themselves?

Still, I feel optimistic. I see a growing Jewish community in Germany gaining self-confidence and unpacking their suitcases at last, feeling safe despite ever-present threats. Sadly, I too have become accustomed to high metal fences and armed police outside Jewish venues, to going through a metal detector before Sabbath services. But, ironically, and not only because of these protections, Germany may today be one of the safest havens for Jews.

—Toby Axelrod

ILANA KRAMER

LILITH marching.



ILANA KRAMER

Medical students were cheered.

DEBBIE DANIS SEIDEN

L-R: Ruth Danis, LILITH managing editor Naomi Danis, Debby Danis Seiden, Marion Danis.

Faith on the March

The April 25 March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C., the largest pro-choice march in history, drew Jewish women and men under the banners of Jewish women's organizations and on their own. Marching with Lilith editors and writers were subscribers and supporters from across the country. Here, **Natasha Rosenstock** *reports on a segment of the marchers many reports have missed: pro-choice young Orthodox women.*

Alene Grossman and **Miriam Plotinsky**, who marched with their mothers in April, have much in common, including that their place in the Modern Orthodox community made them different from many other Jewish women present on the National Mall. Both are Sabbath observers, keep kosher and attend an Orthodox synagogue. One grew up in a Modern Orthodox environment, while the other grew up Conservative. One woman's mother was raised in a Reform household, while the other grew up in a non-Jewish Chinese-American family. Yet both mothers had heard of the march, told their daughters they'd be coming to Washington, and hoped to march with them.

Stephanie Grossman, Alene's mother, grew up before *Roe v. Wade* legalizing abortion and thought that this law marked the end of the fight. A financial consultant in Minneapolis, she says she now realizes *Roe* was only the beginning. "It's like the right to free speech. Why is this one a choice the government is supposed to make for me?" Discrimination was always discussed in the older Grossman's Chinese-American family. "This," she says of the threat to women's reproductive freedoms, "is discrimination against women. The grandmother Alene was named after marched on Washington with Martin Luther King, so political activism is a big part of our family."

Religious faith merged with activism in a number of the speeches delivered from stages set up on the Mall and broadcast on huge screens. Remarks penned by **Rabbi Lynne Landsberg**, **Beth Kalisch** and **Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman**, and delivered by Wasserman, boomed out to the huge crowd: "I am here—as a woman, as a rabbi, as a Jew, as a person of faith—to demand that our nation's promise of religious liberty not be violated. Though many would have us believe otherwise, this march is about more than the right to have an abortion. It's about the freedom to choose.…"I am pro-God, I am pro-faith and I am pro-choice."

Miriam Plotinsky, a 25-year-old high school teacher, grew up Modern Orthodox in Indianapolis and now lives in Washington. Plotinsky says that her mother, who marched with her, "is the only child of two Holocaust survivors. She grew up as a Reform Jew, and became observant when she was older. She has always been pro-choice, ever since she was aware of the issue. I don't think that religion influenced her in any way about abortion rights."

As for herself, "I have never considered Judaism in my pro-choice beliefs." Plotinsky told LILITH. I came to terms a long time ago with the fact that my views often contradict my religion, but I choose to observe Judaism in a manner that is consistent with my beliefs," she said.

Both Alene Grossman and Miriam Plotinsky attend Georgetown's Kesher Israel synagogue. While a number of congregants attended the march, Kesher Israel's **Rabbi Barry Freundel** did not. "I have always been troubled by the fact that Jews don't stand up for *halakha* (Jewish law) on this issue, particularly because that's what the polls say and what Americans want: abortion should be available for doctors or health professionals who say that it's necessary for the women's health. In that case, it shifts the decision to health professionals, because most abortions are done for reasons that are insufficient and they destroy that potential for a once in a lifetime human being."

Alene Grossman takes a different view. "If the mother's life or health is in danger you want to have that option, so you're inherently pro-choice. You can be Orthodox and pro-choice, not necessarily pro-abortion. The two go hand in hand because if you don't have a choice, you can't exercise that *halakhically* required option."

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Learning from Baltimore's Jewish Female Elders

Physician, social worker, Zionist activist, shoe retailer, sex educator, artists. Women in the professions, in business, and working as community volunteers are among the 30 Baltimore Jewish women, all are over 75, whose photos and vignettes appear in an exhibition at the Jewish Museum of Maryland until the end of 2004.

The narratives in this show—which features photos by **Joan Roth** and multi-media art commissioned from Jewish women artists from across the country—come from oral histories of women whose lives spanned the twentieth century. Women in many communities have been written out of the official historical records. This exhibition, Weaving Women's Words, created by the Boston-based Jewish Women's Archive, seeks to right this. In the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue, women speak out about their roles in Jewish education, politics, reproductive rights, commerce, philanthropy, violence prevention, race relations, and more. Some of the women here—like **Shoshana Shoubin Cardin**, the first woman to lead many national Jewish organizations, and Maryland State Senator **Rosalie Silber Abrams**—are well known. Others are women whose experiences, now preserved, will bring their lives into the light.

PHOTOS © JOAN ROTH

Amalie Rothschild, artist (left) and Bess Fishman, businesswoman and volunteer historian and archivist (right).

Brenda Brown Rever, who chaired the exhibition and whose foundation funded it, says she was "inspired by the lives of extraordinary and ordinary women who combat the stereotypes of Jewish women. We ignore this age group all too often. I loved the idea of saving these stories. There were so many bonuses to doing this. Everyday women can teach you things about living your own life, especially about resilience." Among the life lessons Rever highlights: "Always have much older and much younger friends; it keeps you grounded." And: "Family closeness is not by accident; it is often by design."

Reproductive Rights Update

In Washington's latest attempt to control women's bodies, **President Bush** in April signed into law the so-called "Unborn Victims of Violence" Act (UVVA). The law states that if someone attacks a pregnant woman, it counts as two crimes against a human being, not one. On its surface the new law seems beyond reproach.

But the UVVA is hiding behind a fig leaf of political correctness. The new law *de facto* elevates the status of a fetus or embryo to a human being. Under UVVA, women who choose to terminate a pregnancy, or doctors who perform abortions, could conceivably be charged with a crime, though proponents of the law claim no.

Pro-choice organizations quickly condemned the law for its deceptiveness. Planned Parenthood Federation president **Gloria Feldt** called UVVA an "anti-choice strategy to make women's bodies mere vessels by creating legal personhood for the fetus."

This was the second anti-choice law in six months that Bush signed. The first, the so-called "Partial Birth Abortion" law, went into effect in November and is being challenged in the courts. At one trial, in Nebraska, a doctor testifying for the Justice Department ended up admitting that the procedure, which is known as the "D and X," could in some instances be medically necessary in order to save the mother's life.

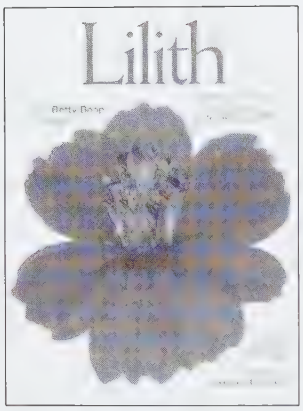
And in a capitulation to right-wing groups, the FDA in May refused to approve over-the-counter status to Plan B, the so-called "morning-after" pill. But six states, and 33 countries, already sell Plan B without a prescription. Moreover the FDA's action came after two expert advisory committees to the FDA had already voted overwhelmingly in favor of selling the pill over the counter. Association for Women in Psychology spokesperson **Paula J. Caplan** has issued a statement that "The FDA's Plan B decision represents another example in a disturbing trend of politicization of science by the federal government to the detriment of women's health." —*A.S.A.*

Readers Respond

IN THE BOX

Thank you for giving voice to those who have traditionally gone unheard. I was ordained as a rabbi 2 weeks ago, and I turn to you for inspiration and expression.

—Anonymous from the suggestion box accompanying the LILITH exhibition "Lilith Magazine: The Voice of Jewish Women" now touring North America



NOT IN MY BACK YARD

Apropos of Rabbi Shafran [Spring 2004]. Addressing domestic abuse is hindered everywhere by the assumption "It's those people over there, not us." Orthodox Jews say it's the secularists; secularists say it's the Orthodox. It's the Edot ha-Mizrach [Jews of the Middle East]. It's other races. It's not upper-class educated professionals.

Our domestic abuse organization in Chicago, SHALVA, organized by the Orthodox community, is careful to address all parts of the community. Assuming "It's them (the Orthodox, or whoever) and not us" holds us all back from addressing the issue.

—Rose Ann Chasman Chicago, IL

BETTY BOOP'S ROLE MODEL

I feel no story about Betty Boop [Spring 2004] would be complete without mentioning Mae Questel (1908-1998), the actress who voiced more than 150 Betty Boop shorts, and came back for a command performance at the age of 80 to do Betty Boop's voice in the film "Who Killed Roger Rabbit."

One day, when I was living in New York, I practically hit a guy who was standing in the middle of the street, shouting up at a window. I recognized Woody Allen, later realized that he had been directing a scene from "Oedipus Wrecks," his section of the trilogy film "New York Stories" (1988). In the film, Mae Questel plays the suffocating Jewish mother to Woody's neurotic, middle-aged lawyer son. One day he takes her to a magic show where she is chosen to assist the magician in a disappearing act. Mysteriously, she never reappears, and suddenly her son's life seems simple and easy. Until, that is, she shows up as a giant apparition looming in the sky above Manhattan—you could even see it as Betty Boop's revenge.

Here's Mae Questel's bio, from a film database. Her own story is very interesting, and probably the prototype for Betty Boop's. Mae was 17 and living in the South Bronx when she won a local contest to find the girl who most resembled Helen Kane, a popular singer known as the "Boop-Oop-A-Doop Queen." Betty Boop creator Max Fleischer heard Mae doing her "boop-oop-a-doop" routine and hired her to do the character's voice in 1931. She served as the voice on more than 150 Betty Boop animated shorts until the character was retired in 1939. Her recording of "On The Good Ship Lollipop" sold more than 2 million during the Depression.

Trivia: She not only provided the voice of Olive Oyl in the 'Popeye' cartoons, but the toddler Swee'pea as well. In film she was best known as the matchmaking Mrs. Strakosh, one of Barbra Streisand's card-playing neighbors, in "Funny Girl." Her Orthodox Jewish family was totally averse to her having an entertainment career. Her parents and grandparents had their wills drawn up accordingly so as to discourage this career choice.

—Liz Safirstein Leshin Los Angeles, CA

TEEN BODIES (AND MINDS)

Attended a family bat mitzvah on Saturday evening and, mindful of your article [on oral sex among young Jewish teens at bat and bar mitzvah parties: Winter 2003], my husband and I spent a good deal of time patrolling the restrooms and dark corners. The girls were quite bored, it seems, and spent much of the evening in the bathroom pulling apart the floral arrangements and critiquing each other's dresses and bodies. The men's room, it turned out, was of much greater interest. There, my husband reported, the boys, rather than focusing on the girls, were much more interested in each other, and in experimenting with kissing the other boys. So, an extra, homoerotic wrinkle to your point that these events are staging grounds for Jewish teen sexuality.

I've also decided to make a donation to LILITH on behalf of said bat mitzvah. Honestly, a family that can afford such an evening doesn't need my $100 check as much as some of my favorite Jewish women's causes. I've decided that from here on in, I'm just sending donations in the name of bar and bat mitzvah celebrants.

—Miriam Peskowitz Philadelphia PA

LILITH welcomes articles, fiction, poetry, and memoirs. We reserve the right to edit letters. No submissions can be returned without SASE.

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Thank you for the piece about Jewish teens and oral sex. You did an excellent job uncovering this disturbing phenomenon and raising the issues of self-image, sexuality, peer pressure and gender imbalance that it encompasses.

I spent the better part of the weekend discussing this with friends, family and the mothers in my mother-daughter book club, a group which plans to tackle this as our daughters approach bat mitzvah age. I also intend to share the piece with my colleagues working with youth groups, to ensure that they are incorporating this information, and strategies to address this problem, into their programs. Congratulations on a well-done piece, which I hope will raise awareness in the Jewish community and beyond.

—Lisa B. Eisen
Washington, DC

Imagine a hall with tables holding a couple of hundred women of all ages. In the front, a large round table seating a group of girls, 11-15 years of age. There they sat, while (most of) the rest of us participated: asking questions, reading, singing and dancing. There they sat, like pale porcelain dolls. All appeared thin, immaculately garbed and coiffed, hyper-conscious of their appearance. They said almost nothing, did almost nothing except to flutter and periodically finger their hair. I was overwhelmingly struck by the contrast with the lively group of pre-bar-mitzvah boys I tutor.

This was at a women's seder this spring. The seder itself, led by three of us women rabbis and three women cantors, felt wonderful: lively, musical, meaningful—and definitely feminist.

The seder meal was an additional shock. Why? I had expected, at such a gathering, that the conversation would be other than [about their] dermatologists, what they would and would not eat, the status of their nose jobs, and repeated comments about their physical appearance, their attractiveness. Eating with many of their mothers, I could not keep my eyes from straying again and again to this table of young women. I left the seder burdened with a poem I had to write.

Doll-Body Daughters

We, the mothers,
the grandmothers…
drank the waters of life
from Miriam's cup
rose to dance
shaking tambourines so hard
the room split

into those of us
who would, could
accept freedom
wild-hair flying
kicking away shoes
with impossible heels
moving bodies
we too often reject

and those
who could not
partake of the feast
of freedom
a round table of
doll-body daughters
bound
into slim form
so they could
reveal
tiny bellies
above tiny skirts
and tight, short, latest style
strait-jackets …

I have so many questions.

The ritual four
could not be asked
by these four daughters
whose silent voices
did not rise to challenge
their bondage
who did not rise to dance
hair flying
who could not eat
the feast of liberation

The blood and tears
I shed this night
I shed for the daughters
of my people
doll-body daughters
enslaved
mummified
in their cosmetic
Mitzrayim

—Rabbi Nomi Oren
Miami, FL

Dear Readers:

Thank you so much for your responses to LILITH. Now it is my turn to write to you.

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Thank you very much for making sure that LILITH lives.

Susan

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor-in-Chief

Lilith

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Career Shock

A New Jewish Mother Enters the Mommy Wars

by Sarah Blustain

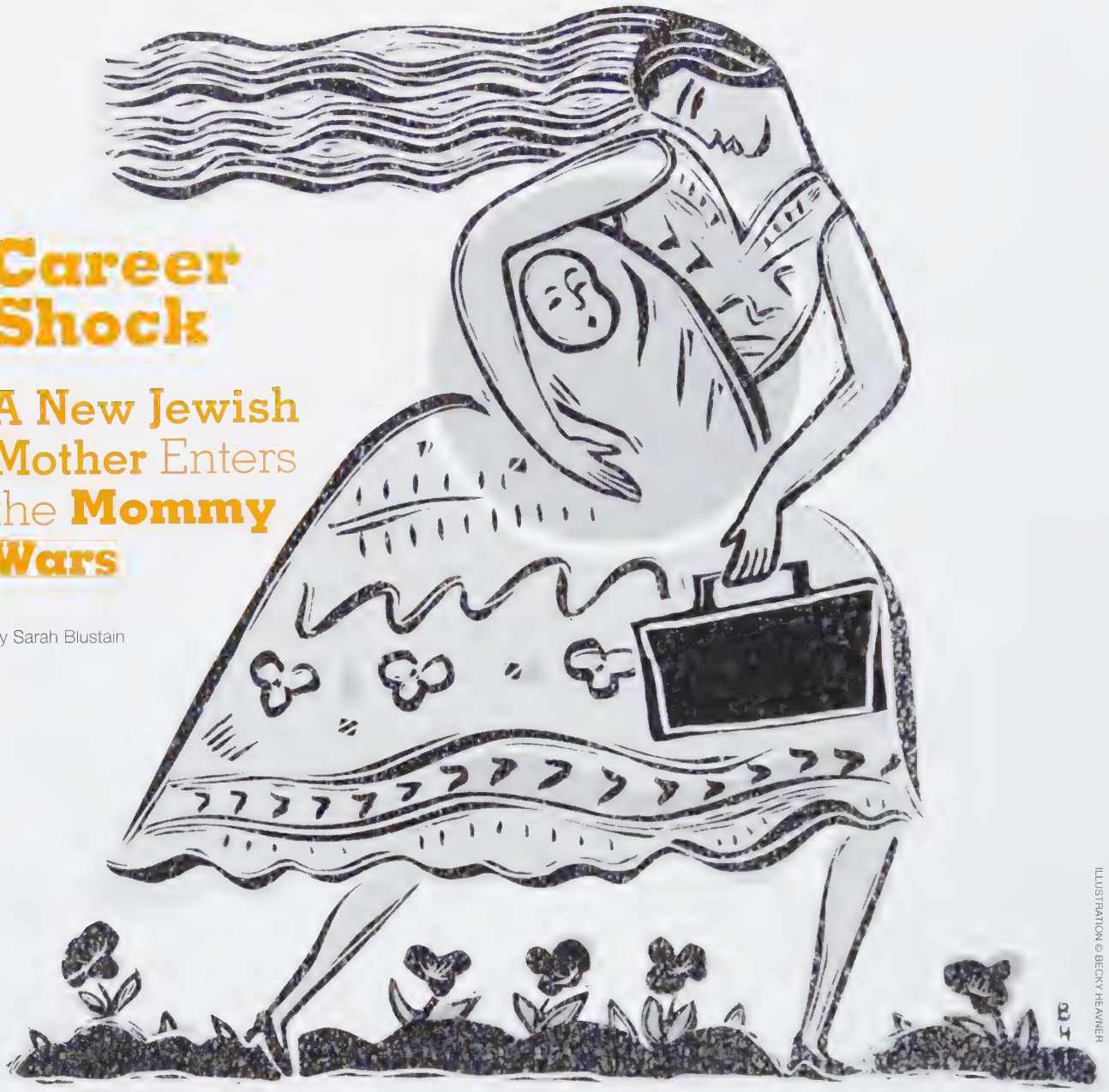

ILLUSTRATION © BECKY HEAVNER

An egalitarian society must have women in its leadership. But this can't happen when the choices are **opt out or burn out.**

In the third grade, 1976, I sit next to a boy named Rich. Like all the kids in my class, we work at "contracts." Each week, we draw up a written agreement with our teacher for what we think we can reasonably accomplish that week. The faster students take on more. Rich and I work fast, but my motives for doing so are not entirely pure. It's true, I'm a quick worker and easily bored. But I also want to beat him. Even close to three decades later, the memories of peeking over at his desk, of hurrying to finish, make my hands a little jittery. I want to win.

That was the starting gun in a race that has been going on ever since. My little racecar, painted on the side with bright colors, sometimes pulled ahead, sometimes dropped behind, but basically kept pace with the rest of the pack. Until now. Suddenly, as we zoom around the track, there is an obstacle smack in the middle of my lane. I don't see it until it's nearly too late. I grind to a halt as the other cars speed on around me. Jealous and exhausted, I come to a full stop.

I have had a baby.

When I express my frustration and puzzlement to people, I think their snickers are nearly audible. Didn't you know? Didn't you know you might cut back on work, lose status, lose income, lose professional contacts, lose friends, lose speed? In fact I didn't. I thought I could just take some time out while the little fellow got adjusted to the world, then get back to business, cutting back on my hours here and there, relying on my husband to do the same, adding day care, or nanny care, for the rest.

So into my seventh month of pregnancy, I was negotiating with my boss. I had been working 50-plus hours a week. I asked to work 30. My boss said no. I asked for 50, with two days a week at home. He said no. I considered taking my four months maternity leave and going back. I didn't consider it for long. I quit, and in an instant put myself back at what felt like the starting line of the race to have it all.

Nearly a year later, I am in the bathroom. I am sick with a sore throat, about to get a stomach flu. I am exhausted and weeping. My child, as sensitive as a nine-month old can be, looks worried, but he cannot suppress his baby-needs, either. He crawls around me, whining lightly. My husband, working down our long, narrow hall, talks on the phone. He is using his business voice, and it goes on and on. This makes me nearly crazy. One phone call after the next, pushing, negotiating, progressing. A tight fury takes over me. How did it happen? I ask this over and over, tired, weak, envious. We do similar work—he is a self-employed writer who works at home—so I thought his flexible schedule would help us divide it down the middle, cut the career costs in half. Instead, he is traveling full speed, while I am stalled, trying to pee before my kid crawls over and puts his hand in the toilet.

It's not fair, I know, to live this competitively. It's not a picnic for my husband either. And, as he points out when I complain, I have had every option. I could have returned to my job, hired full-time babysitting care to help. And indeed, having decided not to, I have found another situation that should be nearly ideal: I have a job, two days a week, working from home, with proportional benefits. Plus other freelance work and a sitter who comes three days a week. I can add more days when I'm ready, or not, as I like. I have Tuesdays and Thursdays to myself with baby to play, stroll, look for playmates and adventure. Even better, I have a husband who works at home. He stops at 6 every day to look after the baby while I make dinner. He gets on the stationary bike two days a week, and he spells me on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 45 minutes after lunch so I can do the same. Perfect.

And yet it isn't going well. Nearly every work day, as I try to lock myself in my office, I am distracted by some baby-stage I haven't encountered before, or just by my desire to go downstairs and give my toddling son a hug. When baby won't nap, I can't resist hovering in the hall to give advice to the sitter. When I hear him babbling away in full, incomprehensible sentences, I want to go babble back. When he cries uncontrollably, I know I can go hold him for a minute and he'll calm down. In all this, during my work day my sitter and I are a team. I mostly let her be, but I keep one ear turned toward the rest of the house, so I know when the baby slept and for how long, when he ate, and generally how his day went. The tidbits—what he ate and how much, for instance—I ask the sitter as she gets ready to leave.

My husband takes his daytime breaks by checking the stock market. I break by reading and posting to "mommy" list-serves. One day each week, I work a full day, 9 to 5, out of the house. When I come home I ask my husband whether the baby took an afternoon nap. My husband tells me he doesn't know, he was working. I don't know how he does it. When our baby cries, it is almost as if I were crying. When he laughs, I wish I were there. I am shocked by all of it—my husband's ability to tune out the baby, and my inability to. Difference feminism did have a point. I know that if my career has taken a hit, it is at least partly my "fault."

But it's not just the work days that are hard. Nearly every "baby day" is harder. Usually I start out full of beans, happy to give breakfast and set out on an adventure to Barnes and Noble or the waterfront. But work spills over from the other days, and I not-so-silently pray for my baby to nap easily and long. When he doesn't, I am overwrought, sometimes enraged. My husband's tap-tap-tapping on the computer down the hall only invites comparison and I fume. From time to time, during the work day, I notice that my husband takes a nap or a walk to Starbucks for a slice of iced lemon pound cake. This is indeed the icing on the cake. I tell him in a fit of anger one night that he must walk the dog, take out the trash, and wake up at 6:30 am with the baby one day a week so I can sleep in. He does all that, but it doesn't help. Every minute of our Tuesdays and Thursday I count as his "freedom" and my enslavement.

My husband takes his daytime breaks by checking the stock market. I break by reading and posting to **"mommy" list-serves.**

It's like me and Rich in third grade all over again, doing similar work side by side. But someone has slipped a caveat into my contract—"Sarah will accomplish these things in her career, with exceptions for the times she is changing diapers, getting up at 4 a.m. to breastfeed, preparing dinner, taking the baby to his doctor's appointment"—while my husband's is unamended.

Basically, my complaints come down to this: How come my career has taken a hit and his, entirely, has not? Sometimes the answer seems like a societal conspiracy, sometimes an accidental byproduct of being around the house, sometimes a flaw in our relationship, and sometimes just a result of my own overactive superego. But then I look around and I know that the latter can't be the whole story. Everywhere I look the moms are stopped on the track. I talk to them, or e-mail them, every single day. I joined the DC Urban Moms listserve and the NoVa (Northern Virginia) Moms listserve; I joined DC Urban Mom-

www.lilith.org

mies listserve, and the MOMS Club of Old Town and the Old Town Moms listserve. Hundreds of moms. Thousands of moms. One afternoon, I meet a stay-at-home dad. Once. I don't know all these moms' stories, but the very fact of them tells me that things aren't as different as they were supposed to be. We women are still stopping our little racecars. Some of us for three months. Some of us for three years. And the men (and non-procreating women) in our lives speed by.

I read everything that's written about "my" situation. And these days, that's a ton. Every magazine, every publisher, is finally reflecting the ambivalent truth that has been dawning on individual women for a decade or two: The gains of the feminist revolution were massive—but incomplete. Women were making professional gains, but at too a high cost to their personal and familial lives.

I was of the next wave of working women, starting out from college in 1991. My friends and I don't talk about being Wonderwoman. We're straight out of the pages of the new books and magazine articles (see page 21). Nearly every childed woman I know is negotiating for part-time work, at-home work, something to keep the mind alive while keeping the relationships sane. Which means that when I am offered the opportunity to apply for a major office-based job, I let the deadline slip by, sending off a hopeful e-mail that "next time" they have a spot I'll be ready to roll.

Those who are afraid of this new development call it a backlash. I think it sounds a bit like progress. But a part-time career —or even a moderately slowed career—was never what I envisioned. I half suspect that if I had been better prepared for all the changes that come along with baby—if I had really learned to expect the arc of my professional life would include a gap for childrearing, I wouldn't be so angry. What bothers me is not the "price of motherhood," as Ann Crittenden called it in the title of her important book on the subject, but the differential between the professional price of motherhood and the professional price of fatherhood.

When I talk to older feminists about the way things were, they'll tell you that no one expected women to do anything with their careers. It was great if you did anything at all. Born in 1969, I learned the opposite lesson. You can do anything a boy can do. Just listen to the words of 1974's "Free to Be You and Me." It's full of the gender-rule bending that we now think we take for granted.

In my middle school and high school, boys and girls played sports in gym together, attended shop class (our choice of wood or metal) together as well as home economics, applied to the top colleges. In college, it was much the same. We took the same classes, graduated, competed for the same jobs. No one talked about babies. No one suggested to our 22-year-old selves that our ten- or 15-year plan include some time out—even four months—for child-bearing. No one suggested that we find careers that would be flexible when the time came for us to want to spend time with our families. And, quite frankly, we didn't think about it.

Of course I'm not suggesting that better "preparedness" is the end of the story. I'm not going to line up with the difference feminists and say that because I hear the baby's cry louder than my husband does, I—and professional women everywhere—are fated to accomplish less than our male counterparts. The difference might be biological, but I haven't found a significant difference in my my intellectual capacity or in my ambition. It's time for a revival of equality feminism—with a twist. What if we suggested that instead of women always trying to accomplish more, men might accomplish *less*. What if we acknowledged—finally—that child-bearing and child-rearing always slow a career, but that we can distribute that slowing more fairly. What if there was actual equality between the sexes—equal parental leave offered for mothers and fathers? And what if fathers, and fathers-to-be, learned to expect and accept that the birth of any child would impact the work they did over their careers—less money earned, one less book written? Yes, this would require the entire working world to acknowledge the existence of families more than it does today. It would spell the end of the mommy track and the beginning of the "family track"—which, since *most* people still have children, might over time become just the way work works.

In the end, these voices were too loud in my head. I couldn't bear it.

After 11 months of not working and working part-time, I decided to get in the fast lane again. One good opportunity after the next came along, and I had been taught to say yes, take the bull by the horns. So I took on full-time work and hired just enough babysitting to cover: If I work every minute of every day that my sitters are here, I will have just barely fulfilled my obligations.

It is an impossible situation, trying to connect with baby and husband, work full time, do grocery shopping, make dinner, manage the "staff." I often wake up at 5:30 in the morning—no alarm—and sneak in some work before the baby wakes. On Saturdays, my "sleeping-in" day, I sometimes manage to secretly turn on the computer while husband and baby are downstairs and work for two hours instead of sleeping. One recent Saturday afternoon, I dumped two pounds of string beans for that night's dinner party onto my desk and snapped the ends off while I read through materials I was supposed to have finished days before. Right now, it is 3:30 a.m., and I am at the computer, loathe to waste the insomniac's hour or two readjusting my pillow.

I am not happier, but I am less angry this way. I am back on track. I am again the person I was. But if I am less angry, there is a different tug at my heartstrings. It has only been two weeks, but I miss my baby, though I see him throughout the day. I even wish for an afternoon with him, loading the dishwasher while he pulls the spoons out and spreads them on the floor. Full speed ahead doesn't leave time for that. And so I find myself, at 4 in the morning, weeping again and agonizing about what I've taken on and what I've given up. No sooner has my little car started again than I want it to stop.

ILLUSTRATION © BECKY HEAVNER

We Need a **Playground Revolution**

by Miriam Peskowitz

It's a bit crazy and a big surprise. Am I really a stay-at-home mom who spends five afternoons a week at the neighborhood playground? Nearly every day, for years, I pack my young daughter into the stroller. I load the sippy cups and snacks and balls and toys, the bug spray, extra diapers, baby wipes, sunblock, and a bottle of water for me. When we arrive already it is filled with strollers, preschoolers who run, climb and swing, and their parents. We will stay until rain, sundown or mealtime takes us away.

Much of the time, it's moms only at the park. The women I meet are there because they have quit their jobs to care for their children in a hands-on way. At the playground, day after day, we talk about almost everything—local preschools and morning-out programs, what's happening in the world and the city, our pasts, our families, our travels, restaurants, breastfeeding, weaning, potty training, how we put our kids to bed at night and how little sleep we had the night before. We discuss the weather and hope for rain, sun, warmth, cooler air, lower humidity, or whatever we don't have at the moment. When I need advice about the parenting life, I head to the playground and from the women there I learn much of what I need to know.

My daughter was born early in the fall of 1998. Before that, I was a university professor. I worked hard. I taught and researched and published voraciously. I received fellowships, awards, and prizes. I worked evenings and weekends. I lived in one city and commuted to my job an airplane ride away. When I grabbed the brass ring of tenure, I was not yet 35. I was on the fast track, just like my husband, my best friend, and, more or less, everyone I knew.

Just as I was awarded tenure, **I learned I was pregnant. My leave turned into a resignation.**

Just as I was awarded tenure, I learned I was pregnant. Eight months later, I had taken a two-year leave that would, in the end, turn into a resignation. We had left our apartment, moved into a little Craftsman bungalow, and I was a mother, learning how gender really works in our society. All my academic writing had been on feminist topics. My training prepared me to be aware of how gender works in our culture. That same training had largely bypassed any critical informa-

tion about motherhood and parenting and children. Could anything have prepared me for the real-life lessons I was about to receive in how gender works? In what happens when a woman faces her society and her workplace with a small child in tow?

So I wander about in a daytime world composed primarily of women and children. One question starts to take over: "How did we end up here?" We are college-educated women, raised in decades of massive social change that opened up opportunities for women in higher education, the professions, and public life. We are mostly in our 30s and older, have held interesting jobs, traveled and adventured. We were brought up to be economically independent. Certainly no one really expected us to end up chatting with each other about how to start a baby on solid foods while our husbands work at the office to bring home the family wage. This was not supposed to be the end of the story, and it won't be. The question becomes my obsession. I ask everyone I know. I interview total strangers, new acquaintances, close friends.

Mothers at the playground toss around reasons they are at home. Often these come in a negative form. Someone passes on a horror story about daycare. Everyone shudders and says how glad they are to be near their kids. It's harder to talk about the positive reasons for working less and being with our children: the everyday sweetness of it, the commitment and love amid an ongoing sense of ambivalence and the downright oddness of learning a new way of life, resisting a culture that would have us work all the time.

The statistics tell us that we will never make up the lost pay, and that as mothers we will earn much less in our lifetimes than had we not had children. For some women this is true. When they want to return to the workplace, their opportunities are fewer, and they find themselves stuck in mommy-track jobs.

The world of work is open to us as women, but not set **up to accommodate us as mothers.**

But other women take five years off and jump back in with no problem at all. When we quit our jobs, we have no idea what will happen. We don't know whether this sojourn at the playground last six months, a year, or for life. We take a risk.

When I left my full-time job, it felt simultaneously like the right decision for me, and a move that was entirely retrograde and violated every value I believed in. It's no longer 1952. Women with college degrees aren't supposed to routinely give up their jobs to take care of their children while their husbands bring home the breadwinner's wage. I worried constantly about my decision. Can this be me? Should it be me? Many of us choose to be with our kids not because we have to, but because we want to be near the children we bring into the world. This is a truth that is hard to voice. It comes so close to statements that in the past have limited women's options and opportunities. It risks being misunderstood as anti-woman and anti-feminist. It seems like a dangerous retreat.

Yet, it is real. Something new is happening, something that in my more optimistic moods I think might just give us a little more wiggle room, to break out of the old gender divide that separates work from home, male from female, mind from body. When the media discuss mothers, they tend to divide us into working moms and stay-at-home moms. I can tell you that at the playground, life is more complex. The numbers, too, tell a different story. Roughly speaking, about 40 percent of American mothers combine parenting with full-time jobs; 25 percent are fully at home with their children; and the other 35 percent, combine parenting with some kind of paid work. Mothers in this third group may work five hours a week from a home studio or 30 hours a week at an office. They may take three years off and then build a small business from a spare room. They may work on a consulting basis for a former employer. They may switch fields altogether. The stories are endless. The reality for American mothers, though, is that most of us don't work full time. We need media attention, social policies, and corporate attitudes that acknowledge this. And we need men generally and fathers in particular to share in the labor of children, much as we all share the labor of work.

The playground moms are always talking about work. One woman is a former social worker. Now she leads internet-based support groups for the caregivers of Alzheimer patients, and she does this one evening a week from her home. Another woman has been a flight attendant, and we all know when she has to take a flight or find someone to cover for her, in order to keep open her chance to return to work in the future. Another sells real estate; several times I offer to watch her girls while she goes to a closing. "The attorneys get mad when I bring them," she jokes. Another woman is a nurse, and every Tuesday she does a shift at the hospital. I teach a course each semester at a nearby college. Many of the playground moms work. Still, all call themselves stay-at-home moms, not working moms. Their part-time labor remains invisible. We need words to describe life in between, the real life of parents who want to parent less than full time and to work, also less than full time, despite the societal pressure to do one or the other.

This third group is of mothers are refusing to choose between being solely at home or at work, fully private or always public. We know that the system does not work for us. We know that if we want to spend more time with our children, we do so with great economic sacrifice. Part-time work is not well rewarded, and it mostly comes without benefits, advancement, or fair wages. We know that fathers, too, should be making these sacrifices so they don't fall so heavily on a generation of women. The world of work is open to us as women, but not set up to accommodate us as parents, as mothers. The feminist revolution that made the workplace and some of our laws more equitable to women is going to have to expand to include us mothers, too. The next feminist revolution may just come from the playground.

Miriam Peskowitz's book *Playground Revolution* will be published by Seal Press in 2005.

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Working? Mothering? Conflicted?
It's Everywhere.

Who Am I?

When I had a three-year-old and a seven-month-old, I loved my children passionately, and I was also very unhappy. This made me guilty. What did I have to be unhappy about? I had two healthy, beautiful sons; a husband who sometimes got on my nerves but whom I loved; a house that was often dirty but had a lot of potential; an interesting, albeit badly paid teaching job; several hours a week to write; and enough money at least for the time being. So what in the world was wrong?

...hardest for me as a wife and mother was—maintaining a sense of myself as an individual: work ambitions vs. desire to be a focused uber-mom; negotiating pregnancy advice literature and birth options without resorting to crippling self-blame; barbed negotiations over housework and childcare with my husband; judgmentalism at baby-and-me classes and preschool potlucks; and realizing I didn't have to radically alter my personality for my children's sake."

—from *Dispatches From a Not-So-Perfect Life, or How I Learned to Love the House, the Man, the Child,* by Faulkner Fox (Harmony Books)

LILITH
What the Cards Hold for Jewish Career Women
The Yiddish Lesbian Play that Rocked Broadway
Chassidic Music for Women's Ears Only

The juggling act goes on. This LILITH magazine cover is from Spring 1988.

Is Motherhood Ridiculous?

It seems that on a cultural level, the image of a woman who takes care of her children is not unlike the old psychoanalytic image of the "castrated" woman. Once upon a time, Freud suggested that women's penis envy was psychological bedrock; that it was women's fundamental condition to perceive themselves as lacking. The psychoanalyst Karen Horney pointed out that women did not simply envy an ostensible anatomical advantage; they envied men's participation in the public domain. Today, women participate in the public domain, and the perception of lack once ascribed to women in general has been shifted to the figure of the caregiving mother....

In light of this cultural image, it is not surprising that some women contemplating motherhood fear that their agency, power, prestige, and their very identities are at stake.... Though feminist activism has helped secure for women the public power previously denied them, it has done little to challenge the assumption that women who spend their time caring for children are powerless, un-self-actualized, and at the margins of cultural life."

—from *Maternal Desire: On Children, Love, and the Inner Life*, by Daphne De Marneffe (Little, Brown)

Is Motherhood Sublime?

We are both mothers, and we adore our kids....But like increasing numbers of women, we are fed up with the myth—shamelessly hawked by the media—that motherhood is eternally fulfilling and rewarding, that it is *always* the best and most important thing you do, that there is only a narrowly prescribed way to do it right....

The new momism has evolved over the past few decades, becoming more hostile to mothers who work and more insistent that all mothers become ever more closely tethered to their kids. The mythology of the new momism now insinuates that, when all is said and done, the enlightened mother chooses to stay home with the kids. Back in the 1950s, mothers stayed home because they had no choice, so the thinking goes.... Today, having been to the office, having tried a career, women supposedly have seen the inside of the male working world and found it to be the inferior choice to saying home....In other words ladies, the new momism seeks to contain and, where possible, eradicate all of the social changes brought on by feminism. It is backlash in its most refined, pernicious form because it insinuates itself into women's psyches just where we have been rendered most vulnerable: in our love for our kids.

—from *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It has Undermined Women*, by Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels (Free Press)

Be All You Can Be

Strong, ambitious, highly competent women—the very ones for whom the Feminist Movement opened the doors to power and success—find themselves at a difficult crossroads today, a time when one major need, desire, biological urge (to love, to nurture, to have children, to be the good mothers our own mothers were, or weren't) is in direct conflict with another: that of not only contributing a necessary share of the family income, but of fulfilling the intellectual and professional ambitions for which we've been groomed and primed, often for our entire young lives.

—from *The Bitch in the House: 26 Women Tell the Truth About Sex, Solitude, Work, Motherhood, and Marriage*, edited by Cathi Hanauer (Perennial Books)

Reversal of Fortune

Then, 15 years ago, it all seemed so doable. Bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, split the second shift with some sensitive New Age man. But slowly the snappy, upbeat work-life rhythm has changed for women in high-powered posts....For dual-career couples with kids under 18,the combined work hours have grown from 81 a week in 1977 to 91 in 2002, according to the Families and Work Institute.... Meanwhile, the pace has quickened on the home front, where a mother's job has expanded to include managing a packed schedule of child-enhancement activities....

In the professional and managerial classes, where higher incomes permit more choices, a reluctant revolt is under way. Today's women execs are less willing to play the juggler's game, especially in its current high-speed mode, and more willing to sacrifice paychecks and prestige for time with their family.... Their mantra: You can have it all, just not all at the same time.

...Census data reveal an uptick in stay-at-home moms who hold graduate or professional degrees—the very women who seemed destined to blast through the glass ceiling. Now 22% of them are home with their kids. A study by Catalyst found that 1 in 3 women with M.B.A.s are not working full-time (it's 1 in 20 for their male peers).

—from "The Case for Staying Home: More Women Are Sticking With the Kids," by Claudia Wallis, Time Magazine, March 22, 2004

A Different Desire

Arguably, the barriers of 40 years ago are down. Fifty percent of the undergraduate class of 2003 at Yale was female; this year's graduating class at Berkeley Law School was 63 percent women; Harvard was 46 percent; Columbia was 51. Nearly 47 percent of medical students are women, as are 50 percent of undergraduate business majors (though, interestingly, about 30percent of M.B.A. candidates). They are recruited by top firms in all fields. They start strong out of the gate.

And then, suddenly, they stop. Despite all those women graduating from law school, they comprise only 16 percent of partners in law firms. Although men and women enter corporate training programs in equal numbers, just 16 percent of corporate officers are women, and only eight companies in the Fortune 500 have female C.E.O.'s. Of 435 members of the House of Representatives, 62 are women; there are 14 women in the 100-member Senate.

Measured against the way things once were, this is certainly progress. But measured against the way things were expected to be, this is a revolution stalled. As these [professional] women look up at the "top," they are increasingly deciding that they don't want to do what it takes to get there. Women today have the equal right to make the same bargain that men have made for centuries—to take time from their family in pursuit of success. Instead, women are redefining success. And in doing so, they are redefining work.

—from "The Opt-Out Revolution," by Lisa Belkin, New York Times Magazine, October 26, 2003

Getting Mobilized: Resources on the Web for Working Moms

www.mothersandmore.org
An organization that "cares for the caregiver," a national support group for women who have changed their workplace participation in some way because of parenthood. They connect mothers to each other and provide support as women navigate the rough ground between work and family life.

www.mothersmovement.org/index.htm
The Mothers Movement Online is devoted to the social, economic and political issues affecting mothers. An outlet for women to write about these issues themselves.

www.mothersoughttohaveequalrights.org
Government and society at large place no economic value on those caring for family members. Mothers Ought To Have Equal Rights (MOTHERS) believes that "correcting the economic disadvantages facing caregivers is the big unfinished business of the women's movement."

Trying to Work Again

"Taking time off for family reasons has been a compelling option for women who can afford it. Many mothers say the benefits, especially time spent with their young children, are invaluable. Reversing a nearly 30-year trend, the percentage of mothers in the work force with a child younger than one-year-old dropped to 55% in 2002 from 59% in 1998, according to the Census Bureau.

But many women ultimately want or need to resume their careers. A recent poll of nearly 500 highly educated women who left their jobs mainly for family reasons found 66% wanted to return to work, according to the Center for Work-Life Policy, a New York nonprofit.

…A few companies try to maintain ties with employees who leave for family reasons….Consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton offers former female employees small-scale contract work, such as proposal writing, idea development and working with clients, which can be done from home. Deloitte & Touche LLP, the accounting firm, is planning to launch a "Personal Pursuits" program this year, which will allow employees to take unpaid leave for as long as five years. The firm will run training sessions for those on leave and assign them mentors to stay in touch with them. The company says it hopes to cut down on turnover costs by rehiring people after their leaves.

Catherine King,…one-time Wall Streeter, stayed home after she had her second child.…"There's a part of every woman who has had what it takes to succeed on Wall Street that yearns for that type of overachieving applause that you got, and that motherhood does not allow you to have. There's just no applause," she says. "And I miss that."

— from "Second Chances: After Years Off, Women Struggle To Revive Careers," by Anne Marie Chaker and Hilary Stout, Wall Street Journal, May 6, 2004

Why Women's Organizations Won't Repair Our Mind-Body Split

How to juggle home and workplace? Who is responsible for helping families keep all those oranges in the air? These have been focal questions for feminists since the movement began. The passage of the U.S. Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in 1993 was a great victory. But thanks to restrictions in the act, more than 41 million people, or half of the country's private workforce, are not covered under the act's guarantee of unpaid, job-protected leave, according to the National Partnership for Women & Families. And even if workers *are* guaranteed unpaid medical leave, many cannot afford to take it. And the act doesn't come close to solving the many day-to-day conflicts that come up for parents—mainly women—who are pursuing careers and raising children simultaneously.

For the most part, women's organizations, including Jewish women's organizations, aren't doing anything to help. Repeated calls to the National Organization of Women (NOW) yielded no response to this question, and the policy section on their website devoted to the work-family balance and childcare has not been updated for a year and a half. And at the Feminist Majority Foundation, LILITH's inquiries were directed to an online columnist for Ms. magazine, which is now part of that organization.

Nor are any Jewish women's organizations making this issue a priority. A spokesperson from Hadassah said that while women's issues such as reproductive freedom are at the forefront of their current agenda, helping women balance work and family is "not on the screen at the moment, although it may be in the future." Sammie Moshenberg of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) said that while she believes that quality, affordable childcare for middle-income women is lacking, especially within the Jewish community, NCJW and other women's organizations don't have the resources at the moment to fight that battle. "The political and economic realities today means that NCJW and others are playing defensively and reactively right now. There is not enough [money] and motivation to do proactive work right now," she told LILITH.

Advocacy aside, Jewish organizations generally don't even promote family-friendly and mother-friendly policies *within* their own organizations, saying that they don't have the resources. Of the largest organizations, Hadassah offers some emergency alternative childcare and NCJW offers some flex time and telecommuting options, but no paid family leave, on-site or back up childcare, or a policy of reimbursing childcare costs for after-hours meetings.

In a research project for Journey, the journal of Ma'yan, the Jewish Women's Project of the JCC in Manhattan, Susan Sapiro spoke with a range of Jewish organizations and found that "only one [The Nathan Cummings Foundation] had a paid maternity leave policy that guaranteed an income for longer than a week. ...In many Jewish organizations, staff are expected to accrue and use all of their sick leave and vacation time in order to be able to take paid maternity or parental leave." Sapiro also found that with childcare. "Flexible arrangements are made on an individual level, rather than an institutional one. What this means is that one's ability to get flexible work arrangements is dependent on the good graces of one's supervisor."

Some good news comes from the National Partnership for Women & Families, which spearheaded the FMLA a decade ago and is working to expand benefits where the act leaves off. But, says Jodi Grant, director of Work and Family Programs at the National Partnership, "It's also about changing attitudes in the workplace" to encourage men to take advantage of these same benefits. "If the policies are just used by women, women will continue to be discriminated against in the long run."

Jewish women's organizations should be setting an example for family-friendly workplaces, and working to bring these issues to the top of the national policy agenda. If women are going to be able to lead the Jewish community, Jewish organizations had better make sure that the "opt-out revolution" doesn't take capable women right out of the pool.

—Miriam Stone

Jewish Organizations are "Awful"

Sociologist Rela Mintz Geffen, President of Baltimore Hebrew University, has had her eye on Jewish organizations' policies on childbearing and the workplace for decades. In the 1980s, she directed a groundbreaking LILITH/American Jewish Committee survey of "Jewish Women on the Way Up" ["Struggling? Juggling? Trying to Integrate Our Multiple Roles," LILITH, Spring 1988]. She says that today's dual-career dilemmas are very similar to when she started studying them in the 1970s and 1980s.

She labels "elitist" the arguments, promoted by professional women in a recent spate of articles, that the best thing for working women is to give it a break while they stay home and take care of their children. Focusing on the behaviors of these privileged women deflects attention away from how we change "the structure of society and the workplace...so that mothers *and* fathers can spend more time with their children."

Geffen told Sarah Blustain recently that the Jewish community is "obsessed" with fertility, and that this obsession distracts from the important work of making Jewish workplaces family-friendly for women and men; on this, she says, the Jewish community is "abominable."

"I think that the Jewish community talks a good game" in its programs on this subject, Geffen said, particularly in women's departments of Jewish federations or young leadership groups. "In theory they are in favor of family-friendly workplace," but in practice, they are "awful...very good on advocacy for the rest of the world."

GLASS

a short story

by Diana Spechler

In the kitchen of the house where Shayna grew up, Mother waves a lipstick tube at Shayna's mouth. "Make an O."

Shayna shuts her eyes and puckers. In that dark hangs a negative of Mother's face, closing over Shayna like a lid: vertical wrinkle between the brows, faint beginning of a second chin.

"Tighten your lips up like that and there'll be cracks. You want cracks on your wedding day?"

Shayna takes a deep breath, relaxes her lips, folds her hands in the lap of her white dress.

"That's a girl," Mother says, and applies pressure.

Shayna slips away to the public garden alone. She is early for photographs. She senses Vic will find her there. Tells herself she wishes he wouldn't. He is not the groom. But here he is on the bench, waiting for her. "It isn't bad luck for *me* to see you," he says.

He is also not a guest. "You shouldn't have come," says Shayna. "My bridesmaids will be here any minute."

"One last look. All right?" Vic stands. Smiles. "That kosher?"

"Ha ha," says Shayna.

He touches her arm.

She doesn't smile. She wants to lean her cheek on his collarbone. There are little holes in his T-shirt. She stares down at her shoes, shiny white straps

crisscrossing, binding her toes. "In a year, you won't remember me," she says.

"That's not fair."

"Six months, I'll bet." She wants to touch his T-shirt. She loves the holes.

"There's still time," he whispers. "We could still..."

She shakes her head, squeezes his fingers. She's not sure whose heartbeat she feels. Or whose hand it's in.

Now Shayna sits on that bench in the garden. Nearby, three bridesmaids wear yellow. Heat bears down on the bushes and grass. Shayna hikes her skirts to her thighs and wishes for a breeze. "It hasn't rained in weeks," she says.

"Lucky Shayna."

"What do you want with rain?"

Shayna sees the men coming, filing over the footbridge like soldiers in black and white uniforms, Isaac in the front; she can see his scar, the neat pink curve from chin to cheek, a souvenir from some childhood accident, from back before he could make safe decisions. She used to trace that scar with her finger. It used to feel like a roadmap home. Shayna pushes her skirts back down. Crinoline drops over her legs like a stage curtain.

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Eighteen months ago, one month after Isaac proposed and Shayna said yes, she met Vic at the aquarium. He was the new shark-feeder. Shayna sold tickets from a booth. A right-after-college job. Nothing that ever felt permanent.

One evening at closing time, he stood on the other side of her glass window. Pressed his fingertips to it. Asked, "Can you come out?"

"Maybe," Shayna said into her microphone.

He came around the side to her little door and opened it, grabbed her wrist and pulled her right into the lobby. "It's worth your while," he said. He took her upstairs to the top of a huge tank. All blue water and no fish. They looked down on it.

He wove his fingers through hers. "Hop in," he said, and they jumped.

"A little to the left...that's it. Now just the groom's family....Just the bride's family. That's perfect. Perfect."

The flashbulb explodes and recovers, explodes and recovers. Isaac smiles. The scar smiles, too. Like a back-up smile. A just-in-case. He's smiling for both of us, thinks Shayna.

At the doorway of her apartment, weeks after that first swim with Vic, Shayna said, "Like this. Then kiss your fingers."

"Kiss my fingers?" Vic squinted his blue eyes at the mezuzah. "I'll just kiss *you*," he said. "All right?" He gathered her hair in his fist.

She rested her forehead on his shoulder. He smelled like peppermint.

"All right, Shayna?"

Shayna says now, "Something isn't right." She is on that bench again, her face in her hands.

"Cold feet," says Mother. "But they'll warm right up. Think. You'll make a nice Jewish home. So beautiful. And Isaac from such a nice family. Think of it." She fastens a pearl choker at Shayna's nape. It pinches the fine hairs there.

"Ow!" Shayna lifts her head.

"Stay still!" Mother unfastens. Re-fastens. Squeezes Shayna's shoulders, then goes to sit beside her.

Shayna squints in the sunlight.

"I'm sorry, Baby." Mother touches Shayna's cheek with the backs of her fingers.

Shayna wishes she were sick in bed and seven years old. Wishes her cheeks were burning up from fever. She leans into Mother. "It was my fault," she says. "I shouldn't have moved."

One day, the aquarium closed because of a blizzard and Shayna didn't call Isaac to tell him.

"I love hiking," she told Vic, strapping herself into snowshoes. She thought, *Maybe I will love hiking.* She remembers now that endless stretch of snow, the way her calves ached. Remembers watching Vic's backpack move ahead of her, his green wool hat, his face, pink, now and then glancing over his shoulder.

"You're not fading on me, are you?"

You love this, you love this, because he loves this, Shayna told herself. She followed the green wool. "I'm one hundred percent right with you," she said. She held her breath so she wouldn't pant.

"Cold?"

"Nope."

"Bored?"

She shook her head. She wanted so much to impress him. When he stopped suddenly, cutting off the steady crunch of boots to snow, and held up a gloved finger, Shayna stopped, too.

Behind a skeletal tree, a deer paused, its muscles strong beneath its brown coat, its eyes dark and wary. And watching. For no clear reason, Shayna thought of her parents. She took a step forward. The deer flipped its white tail up and ran.

"Did I do that?" Shayna asked.

Vic shrugged his shoulders. "Probably thought you were a bear," he said. He yanked Shayna's hat down over her eyes.

Shayna readjusted the hat. "I didn't mean to..."

"She was just being cautious. She might have babies nearby. Didn't want us getting too close." Vic touched her face. "What's wrong?" he asked. "Why are you crying?"

Rabbi lifts Shayna's veil. "Is this your bride?"

"Who else's would it be?"

The veil lowers.

Shayna liked watching Vic swim with sharks. He wore an air tank strapped to his back and breathed bubbles. Shayna watched for the bubbles. Breathed when he breathed. And when he was finished, when he climbed out of the water and

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the sharks were alone, Shayna every time had to remind herself to exhale.

It was silly, really. She'd breathed on her own for so many years.

Father hooks Shayna to his arm. "Ready?" He squeezes her hand.

Shayna doesn't answer. She is sweating, but everything is white. She is bathed in white. The white gardenias smell so strong, they make her dizzy.

The *chuppah* is white satin, draped over bamboo poles. The white grows clearer and larger as Shayna approaches. Father lets go. The garden is hushed, pulsing with heat. But the satin looks like snow, looks white enough to melt a fever.

After Shayna told Vic, "It's because of religion, Vic. My parents. My family. I'm *engaged*. We just can't," she still liked to watch him feed sharks.

He said, "You've never taken a risk in your whole life."

"You're not hearing me," she said. "This isn't about risk."

"You don't *always* get hurt," he told her, "taking risks."

When she watched him then, from the dry side of the glass, as he swam weightlessly, his body draped in chain mail like something off-limits, she silently begged the sharks, *attack him, bite him, make him see.*

"I might be sick," Shayna whispers.

"Four more."

"I don't know if I can."

"Of course you can." Isaac and his scar smile uneasily. "Since when are there things you can't do?"

The sensation of spiraling. Gaining speed. One bridesmaid holds Shayna's train. Four. Five. Six. Seven rings around Isaac. Rabbi cloaks Bride and Groom in a tallis. Isaac's shoulder against hers feels like something from a dream. She feels like a mummy. Pictures herself unwinding, away from Isaac, away from Rabbi, spinning and spinning down the grass aisle and out of the garden, like an ace bandage, unraveling.

Rabbi wraps a wine glass in linen. Shayna irrelevantly thinks of a guillotine, a hovering blade. The thought and the heat make her stomach lurch. Rabbi says, "Even in our joy, we remember destruction."

Shayna hears the shattering, the uproar: *Mazal Tov!*

She is racing down the aisle, Isaac at her side, leaving behind a napkin full of shards.

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Shayna knows this: if she still spent her days in that little booth at the aquarium, if she hadn't quit three months ago because of jealousy—she'd grown jealous of the sharks who circled Vic, who depended on Vic, who accepted Vic as though he, too, were a shark—she would still, after all this time, look for Vic's fingerprints from that day he tried to touch her through the glass.

"Your parents have made a good match," a face tells Shayna.

Another face says, "May you both live to a hundred and twenty."

There is dancing: concentric circles cluster and widen, widen and cluster. From her chair above the crowd, Shayna hears her mother: "I'm so happy. I'm so happy."

Shayna, bouncing, smiles despite things. Smiles because of things. Isaac tries to reach her with a handkerchief. She leans toward him and takes it.

Later, Shayna wanders over the footbridge. She feels like she just came through something. Like a warrior, she thinks. She feels very, very brave. Below her, the creek runs and doesn't look back. She thinks of jumping in, of letting it pull her away in her wedding dress, but even from above, she can see the sharp rocks. ●

Diana Spechler's fiction has appeared in a variety of publications, including *The Greensboro Review*, *Jewish Currents*, *Women in Judaism* and the McSweeney's website. She is at work on her first novel.

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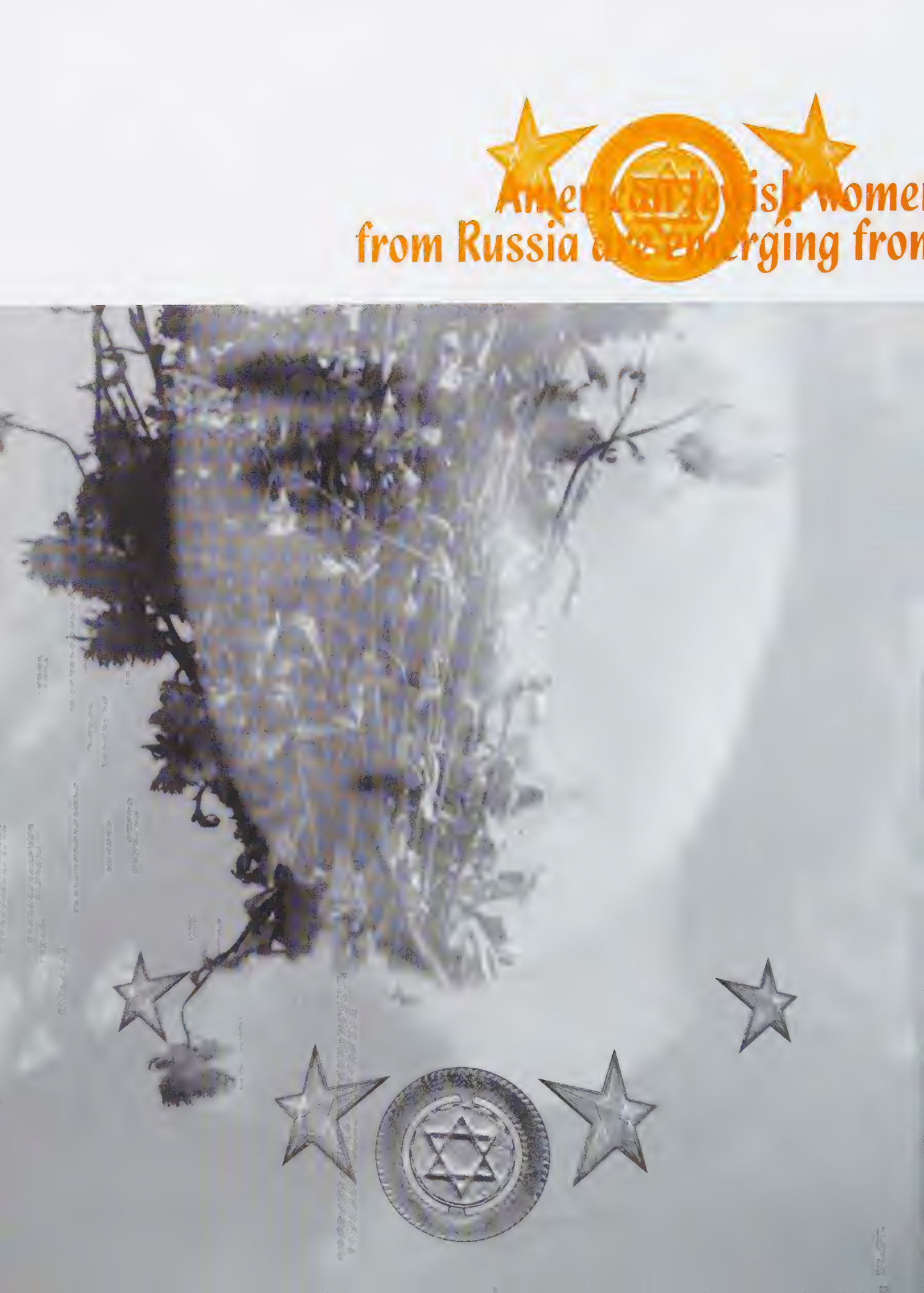
Klara by Marina Rubin

"FINDING A SISTER" ©1987 DEIDRE SCHERER, 34" X 28", DSCHERER.COM. (PHOTO BY JEFF BAIRD)

at 89
she remains
beautiful,
a widow of two,
a mother of two,
a grandmother of four,
a great-grandmother of three,
she keeps all her little belongings
in a thousand individual plastic bags,
and she sits for hours at her brown armoire
and rustles in her parcels,
cotton stockings in one,
rubber bands for the stockings
white and thick in another,
buttons from every dress
ever owned in the third,
in the fourth, birth certificates
for the entire family,
young and strong ones
with our own names,
our own little belongings,
our own separate addresses.
Odd was seeing her name
Klara something, from Budapest
written in chalk on a suitcase
behind the glass
at Auschwitz

Marina Rubin was born in a small town Vinnitsa, Ukraine, in the Former Soviet Union. She came to New York in 1989. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals and literary magazines.


from Russia

nside the Matrushka Doll

Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union profoundly changed the ethnic make-up *of Fair Lawn, New Jersey, my suburban hometown. These immigrants (we called them "the Russians") settled in a town that already boasted a diverse Jewish community with active Reform, Conservative, Orthodox synagogues as well as a large population of Israeli émigrés. By the mid 1990s, Jews made up about 40% of the population of Fair Lawn, many of them immigrants from the former Soviet Union. They put Fair Lawn on the map, making it stand out among the many largely Jewish suburbs that surround New York City. From a New York Times article entitled "A Jersey Suburb with Some Surprises" to history books, commentators refer to Fair Lawn as the prototypical suburban enclave of former Soviet Jews.*

ALL PHOTOS BY JOAN ROTH, EXCEPT FOR PHOTO OF ANNA DOLINSKY

Commentators are less likely to note the ways in which Fair Lawn served as a veritable laboratory for intra-ethnic Jewish relations. As a child growing up in the Orthodox Jewish community of Fair Lawn, I witnessed countless interactions between established, American-born Jews and the "Russian" émigrés. Some of these exchanges were respectful and warm. Through a program sponsored by our synagogue, for example, my parents met Riva and Meyer, a couple from Moldova. Riva and Meyer took my parents to a nightclub in Brighton Beach, thoughtfully pre-arranging kosher meals for them to sample. My parents, in turn, invited them for meals in our family's sukkah. They shared a cultural conversation that enriched the lives of both families.

I recall other interactions, though, that still make me cringe. Here is a true story that is as disrespectful as it is bizarre: the principal of my Orthodox high school decided to give all of the immigrant students Jewish names. Instead of asking the students which names they preferred, or if they had any deceased relatives that they would like to commemorate, the principal decided to dub all the "Russian" boys Daniel (something to do with symbolically coming out of their lion's den). Whenever anyone called out the name Daniel in the hall, all of the male immigrant students would turn around to answer.

Anastasia, my younger sister's classmate, had a similar (and probably more typical) experience. Someone in the school felt that Anastasia needed a more "American" first name. They decided to call her "Stacy"—a name that she loathed—on all of the official class lists. For her bat mitzvah, the parent-teacher association bought her a necklace that featured her new, hated name in cursive gold lettering. While the PTA had good intentions, some gifts can hurt.

To open a more authentic exchange, *we invited six women to the* LILITH *offices for a night of (decent) vegetarian Chinese food and (spectacular) conversation. Each of these women had emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States—some as young children, others as adolescents, another as a 21-year old. They discussed the different ways in which they negotiate a rather complex set of personal identities—as women, as Jews, as former Soviets, as Americans. Throughout the course of their lives in America, all of these women have chosen their own unique and deeply felt names.*

One theme that emerged out of this talk is the fraught relationship between the former Soviet Jewish immigrants and the American-born Jewish community. In these women's experience, American Jews were generous with donations but did not engage in enough real talk. Our panelists now are as firmly embedded in American society as they ever were in the immigrant community—a perfect position to lead a conversation that should have started years ago.

—Rachel Kranson

I would never say "I'm Russian" to anyone from the former Soviet Union; there, being Russian means you're not Jewish

Inna [redacted] is a litigation associate with a New York City law firm. She was born in the former Soviet republic of Moldova and arrived with her family in the United States in 1980, when she was four years old.

On American Jews' Attitude Problem

Rimma: I didn't grow up religious at all. My father would go to synagogue on Yom Kippur, and I remember as a child he thought we should try to go to a synagogue and my mother had no interest. So we went to a synagogue a couple of times, just he and I. And we felt so out of place. We were the former Soviet Jews, we were the "poor" ones. I think mostly that American Jews are incredibly condescending. And they're so proud of their dual bar and bat mitzvah thing—you know like, "I had this bar or bat mitzvah and this poor girl named Svetlana couldn't, so I wore a bracelet with her name."

Inna: You mean they had bat mitzvahs for people who couldn't?

Rimma: Yeah — for the poor Soviet Jews who couldn't. And you know, it kind of rubbed me the wrong way because I find it incredibly condescending. American Jews always seemed so interested in enlightening and ennobling without any true or deep interest in the actual lives and experiences of the émigrés. I've heard American Jews talking about wanting to teach the former Soviet Jews how to be Jews.

Margarita: Something that I definitely felt growing up in Long Island—the sense that the American Jewish community looked down upon the former Soviet Jews. There are definitely instances of people who had done amazing things—for instance, my dad was friends with a man who passed away a few years ago, who was part of the Long Island committee for Soviet Jews, and he was personally responsible for liberating some of the politically oppressed in Russia. He helped to get them out of Russia and into the U.S. and then he helped some establish jobs and start off....But there is still this sense of, you're on the poor side of the family.

Anna: I do think there was some condescension towards the wave of Russian/Soviet immigrants that came to America. My family was adopted by the American Jewish community and we went to synagogue for the first, like, month, and then my parents had other things to do [*laughter*].

Margarita: When we moved in to our new house in Long Island, some of the neighbors came by to meet us. They heard that there was a Russian family that moved into the neighborhood. And this girl who was my age, right across the street, ran over and was so excited to meet me! "I'll help you learn English!" And I said back to her, "Thanks, but I actually already speak English fluently!" [*More laughter.*] And she had already told all of her friends that there was this Russian girl that she was going to teach and help, and then when they met me on the first day of eighth grade – they were speaking very slowly to me, asking how was Russia and if I missed it...and I said that I didn't know, that I was about a year old when we left, and I've been living in the city my whole life. And after she realized that I didn't need her help, I was no longer her friend.

Being Soviet vs. Russian vs. Jewish

Inna: Those words are sort of loaded. I could tell someone that I'm Russian, but I would never say that around anyone who is from the former Soviet Union. Because being "Russian" means that you're not Jewish.

Anna: I get lectures about that from my parents all the time! [*Laughter, agreement.*]

Margarita: I had to go through the whole explanation when my uncle and aunt—they came here about 10 years after we did —they had a very big issue with writing that their nationality was "Russian" on American documents. My uncle said, I'm not Russian, I'm Jewish. And you were Jewish on your passports, and on all your documents, that was part of the issue in Russia. So being Jewish was a national identity for him as well as a religious one.

Inna: That seems to be a very difficult concept for Americans to understand. Because most of the time I get, are you Moldovan? I say, no, I'm not ethnically Moldovan. I'm Jewish. And they say okay, are you Russian? I say no.

Olga: That has definitely been discussed extensively in my family too. The issue that we were never Russian there, that's why we were persecuted there, that's why we couldn't do what we wanted to do there, couldn't achieve what we wanted to achieve. And then to be identified as Russian when we got here was a little odd.

Inna: I'm always disappointed that I don't speak [Russian] well but I think my family feels like, what can you do? That's

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In college, I realized I was more Russian than American; if my mother didn't [illegible] from me at least once a day...

Mar[illegible] Levi *works in private equity, evaluating investment opportunities for retail, manufacturing and life science companies. She grew up in Queens and Long Island, and has lived in Manhattan for the past eight years. She arrived in the United States as a baby in 1980.*

the price of coming here, and going off to the schools you went to, and not hanging out with us every night.

Olga: I feel like when I speak Russian I get taken back to being a child, so when I speak to my parents about just kind of everyday things, I can talk in Russian. But when it's something serious, I find that I just can't. Not because I can't find the words but because it makes me feel like I'm 10. As opposed to when I speak English, it makes me feel as old as I am.

Anna: I think I tend to use the Russian identity when it suits me. And I probably bought into the American definition of "Russian" because I do say that I'm Russian without thinking of the distinction between "Soviet" and "Russian," even though when I think about it in conversation with other Russians I would say that I'm Soviet....And something that I'm sort of embarrassed about but I—I've spent a lot of time in Europe because my boyfriend lives over there. When I'm over there I always manage to bring up the fact that I was born in Russia. Only then do I start talking about the fact that I'm American, and I adhere to these American political ideals. So the point is, I sort of tend to use that as a temper to my American identity.

Margarita: Why?

Anna: I think because it makes me, sort of, less of a typical American. Which in all other senses I probably am. I had a typical high school experience, a typical college experience. I had very few Jewish friends, I had very few Russian friends. I don't know how I managed to do that at Yale!

Margarita: Going through college, I realized that I was a lot more "Russian"—especially in my relationship with my family—than American. When I was living in the dorms, if my mom didn't talk to me, or hear my voice, at least once a day, I'd get these panicked voicemails—where are you? Are you alive? And she actually worked about 10 blocks away, so she could have just stopped by and seen me for lunch. I would talk to some of my friends and they're like, oh yeah, I talk to my parents about once a week. And I'm thinking, oh, that would never happen. I just can't even imagine that scenario.

Rimma: You said a couple of times that you learned from your more recently emigrated friends about relationships, that they have relationships differently. I'm not quite sure what that means.

Margarita: I just found that my Russian friends had a deeper understanding of me. One friend is a great example: she was dating an American guy—he's a great guy, he was really there for her. They lived together, and her mom was sort of like a neurotic Russian mom, called her 15 times a day, needed to tell her how to do everything around the house [*laughter*]. It was sort of like, I know you're in your mid-twenties but I'm still going to tell you how to live your life. And she told me that a very pivotal part of her relationship with this man was when he told her, "You just have to cut your mom off. Just let her go." And she understood that he could not understand how her family worked. And for her, it wasn't an option to reject her mom or her family. But he was someone who talked to his mom once or twice a week and everyone was always cheerful. And I guess her family was more rambunctious, and that made him uncomfortable.

Olga: I don't know if I necessarily agree that it's a characteristic of American men and Russian women. Because I live with a man who is not Russian but who is Jewish, and I never thought that he didn't understand the way that my family worked. I think that he does, and even though its probably a little bit different than how his family works, there are a lot of similarities and I think he feels very comfortable with my family. He's got a Jewish mother himself [*laughter*].

Anna: Maybe the attitudes that each of us has toward Russian peers or Russian friends come from our parents' attitude? My parents—for the longest time—just did not like Russians. At all. They didn't want to have anything to do with the Russian community. I remember one time I liked a guy who had a pretty tenuous relationship with Russia—he was from Armenia. My parents flipped out, completely. They said, you are going to get dragged under. Under what? [*Laughter.*]

Rimma: You were subverting the assimilationist project!

Margarita: That's funny, because my parents had the reverse. They're like, you need to date a Russian Jew. And I'm thinking—it's hard enough as it is! [*Laughter.*] And it's funny because they also said, you have to have Russian Jewish friends. And it's only once they stopped saying it, that I naturally did it, because it wasn't something forced and I didn't think about it. I was dating someone in college

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When our mothers were growing up it was expected they would have a career, get married, have kids. Whereas here...

Olga [illegible]ts, 24, is a medical student at New York's Weill Cornell Medical College. She moved to the United States from Minsk, Belarus, at the age of 10, and grew up in Stamford, CT.

who was far from the perfect Russian Jew that my mom envisioned. He was Irish-Italian, Roman Catholic. And this was someone who wanted to convert to Judaism. He said he wanted to convert, to become Jewish, to learn my language to communicate with my parents. But I told him, they speak English! If I understand what you're saying, they'll figure it out! [*Laughter.*]

Margarita: When you look at who'd you be happy with, part of that, I think, is someone who does understand your background and your personal history. And yes that's something I would like. Does it have to be someone who's Russian-Jewish and has gone through everything I have? I don't think that's vital, that understanding does not have to stem from having gone through the same experience. Now I'm dating a Russian Jew and I like it, but it really is the person. His similar background happens to be an extra bonus.

Olga: I don't think I've ever been in an environment where there was this huge selection of Russian-Jewish people. When I went to high school, even though most of my parents' friends are Russian-Jewish, there really weren't that many Russian people who went to my high school or were in my classes, and then I went to college at Dartmouth and that's not exactly a place with a thriving Russian-Jewish community! [*Laughter.*] So I never had this, well, buffet of Russian Jews to pick from!

Inna: You're not tapped into the Russian set-up network!? [*Groans, laughter.*]

Olga: I'm engaged, so that's sort of out of the question right now [*laughter*]. But in college, I never dated guys like that, and then after I graduated I met my current significant other.

Rimma: My partner and I have a Jewish home, because she's an American Jew. But in a way, she could be as foreign as a space alien to me, as I'm sure I am to her. Because then I'll be like, oh you Americans. Even though I feel so American I sometimes say, you Americans, I don't understand you! [*Laughter.*] Your food, I don't understand it. But I really enjoy that we have a Jewish life. And I guess what I mean by a Jewish life is that we have a strong Jewish community, when we go to synagogue we have a place to go, we have community we can go with. But I feel like whoever I'm with, I'm going to be different from that person. Because I'm not going to find anyone who is like me! Were I to find someone who was a former Soviet whatever, were I to find someone Jewish, are they going to be a techie? Are they going to a vegaquarian [a vegetarian who eats fish]? [*Laughter.*] Are they going to be so many other things? But even with all that, I enjoy being with someone who's Jewish. I enjoy not having to have that conversation of—I understand that the crucifix is an important symbol to you but I'm not so thrilled with having it hang above my bed. [*Laughter.*]

About Feminism...

Inna: In high school, when I started identifying as a feminist, it sort of seemed funny to my parents. And the crazy thing is---and I tell my mother this now, I should have told her then—where did she think I learned all this stuff from? I learned all this stuff from her! But that wasn't the way they saw it. Even now when I say things about my career or I have an experience where it's difficult to be a woman in a certain setting, or I talk about how I'm at a meeting with 12 people and I'm the only woman, they say—well you just shouldn't care about that. Just do what you have to do. And I think, well that's a very feminist attitude. But at the same time, they turn around and think it's very funny when I say I'm a feminist....

Olga: I think part of it is that when our mothers were growing up it was kind of expected that they would have a career, they would get married, they would have kids. Whereas here I think it's still a big rising point, people argue about whether you can have all of those things. But our grandmothers did it, our mothers did it, and it's kind of the way they think that things just are. I think if a woman chooses to be a stay-at-home mom, it seems to them like a luxury, rather than that she should have been there in the first place.

Anna: I remember in college I got a second-hand copy of *The Feminine Mystique*, and I read it and I loved it...and I gave a copy of the book to my mother and she started reading it, and she calls me up and says, what kind of trash is this? [*Laughter.*] She said, this is ridiculous, none of this is true. Now here's my mother, she has a job and everything, but she

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I discovered a very unpleasant but powerful identity. I think I'm Soviet. I feel uncomfortable when someone describes a luxurious lifestyle.

Lara [illegible] came to Brooklyn from Moscow in 1994 with her husband and mother. Now she lives in Staten Island. Her book of short stories, There Are Jews In My House, *was published to great acclaim. She is currently working on a novel set in Russia, Europe and the U.S. in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.*

got married when she was 20, and had me when she was very young. So first she had me and then she went to school and then she had a career. So she went through all of it, she knows how hard it is to be a woman. But she refuses to put language to it, or put words to it....

Margarita: I think that's interesting because I called Rachel [Kranson] and we had this conversation where I voiced my concern about this magazine because I didn't really consider myself a feminist. But then I thought back and I remembered what I had as my high school quote, and it was: "The man who says it can't be done is usually interrupted by the woman who's already doing it." And that clearly defined the way that I was, at least, thinking then. Not so much marching around carrying a poster, but I was always concerned about my career and doing something I enjoyed.

I felt like all through college while I was figuring out my career plans, my parents were very supportive of me getting that career going. But somehow a year afterward they were like, so—Who are you dating? When are you getting married? And I was like, that's not how it works! I have these interests, I really like what I do, there's more to it! And it never occurred to me that the next thing was getting married and sitting at home. So I feel like they were very supportive at first, and now that they realize the path that I've chosen they're getting very frightened, they think I'll never have a family or I'll never want that.

Lara: I think I had almost exactly the opposite experience. My mother had a brilliant career. And I got married at 21, which is very common in Russia because college girls usually get married during the last years of college so I did what everybody did, I got married. But I didn't expect to stay home with the children, because in Russia I would have had a career like my mother's. But when I got here, I couldn't find a job and I couldn't afford to go to school, and I stayed home with the children. And I was so ashamed of it. I thought, what would my mother think about me? It's such a disgrace to stay home with the children and not to have a career. And I was approaching 30—I was 28—and I wasn't thinking what if I never get married, what if I never have children. I was thinking the opposite—what if I never have a career? What will I do? That's so shameful. So I approached my career at 28, after I had two children, and I started school.

Being Jewish in Russia

Rachel: I'm going to switch directions a little bit. I wanted to ask if you remember a particular moment at which you became aware of having a unique background.

Lara: I'd like to talk about this. For me, it was very painful to discover that I was Jewish. I even wrote a story about this in my book, it's called "There Are Jews in My House." I used to think of the word Jewish as an insult. It was something humiliating, to be called a Jew...and horrible things would happen to me. When I was five and I was in pre-school, one of the bigger girls approached me and said, I know something about you. So she took me to the bathroom. And she was twice as big as me and I was really afraid of her. And she said to me, you are a Jewess. And she also said not Jewish, but "Jewess." And I said, "Why?" And I didn't really know what it meant because nobody in my family or on television or anywhere had used that word. Somehow I understood that it wasn't a good thing and that it was unfair that I was Jewish. And she said, what do you mean, why? Look at yourself, look at yourself in the mirror! So I looked into the mirror and she pointed out, look at your nose. You have a Jewish nose. And look at your eyes. You have Jewish eyes. And look at your ears. And she tried to fix my ears. [*Laughter.*] A Russian person would say that [a Jewish ear is] pink, fleshy, bent. She said, your ears don't look Jewish, but it doesn't matter. You are a Jewess, all the same. And I was so upset, and I came home and I cried the whole day. And I said, if we have to be something, why Jews, the most horrible thing? Why can't we be Uzbeks, at least?

Rimma: You know what I just remembered, was that my mother told me that in school, in the teacher's gradebook, they would list your nationality. [*Murmurs of assent.*] So that it would be your name, and the fact that you were a Jew, and then, you know, whatever grade you were getting in your math class. That was relevant!

Inna: Yeah, so they could lower the grade for Jews if there were too many with high marks.

I loved being called "The Commie," because it was a cool thing that I was from Russia.

Anna [redacted] came to the U.S. in 1989 from St. Petersburg. She is involved in AIDS research at the Yale School of Public Health, and will be starting a joint-degree program in law and public health at Georgetown and Johns Hopkins in the fall.

Anna: When I went to school—I only went for first grade, but I remember…I had applied to go to a special English school. My parents brought me, and I went through a whole test. I had to recite a poem, and they asked me who Lenin was, and I said "the father of our nation," and I did some math problems. It was very embarrassing, my father still brings it up, and I still blush. And I got rejected from the school, and my parents explained to me it was probably because I'm Jewish. And I was about eight at the time and I totally didn't understand what that meant. And I didn't until I came here.

On the Immigration Experience

Rachel: For those of you who were in America when you were younger, do you remember any particular moment when you realized that you had a unique background?

Rimma: Before my parents moved us to Fair Lawn, they moved us to another neighborhood in New Jersey, which is working class, no Jews, certainly no Russians, and I was coming straight from Brooklyn. The town was Ridgefield Park. It was the middle of second grade. I didn't have much experience with Polish and Italian Catholics, and suddenly there I was. And I was "The Commie." [*Laughter, assent.*] I was an eight-year-old Commie! That was in 1982.

Anna: The emotional stakes seem to be so much lower for the later generation. I *loved* being called "The Commie," because it was a cool thing that I was from Russia. There was this kid who used to tease me that I was a spy, and I used to say, yeah, I am.

Rimma: Because it wasn't the Cold War.

Inna: I once got a kid sent to the principal's office in second grade, because he used to turn around and yell, COMMIE! COMMIE! And I couldn't pay attention. And I wanted to have a whole conversation with him like, don't you understand? We *hate* Communists! [*Laughter.*] But of course some seventh-grade boy who is turning around in social studies class to call me Commie doesn't want to hear about why you left, and the fact that you're anti-Communist.

Anna: You know, I had a kid on the school bus who turned around and called me "Jew, Jew." And I never reported him. And to this day when I think about it, I'm so embarrassed that I didn't do anything about it. While no one made fun of me for being Russian, there was anti-Semitism. And I'm sure I keep blocking it out of my mind, because it only comes up now that we're talking about it.

Inna: I think when I came to New Jersey was the first time that I realized I was different. I mean—the Commie thing, that didn't happen often. The more general things were going to kids' houses and realizing that you're different. I remember at sleepover parties, the moms would make pancakes in the morning. And pancakes were such a symbol of America to me! And my mother would say, oh do you want to have a sleepover party too? And I didn't want to have a sleepover party because she wasn't going to make pancakes in the morning. She was going to make *syrniki* [cheese latkes], which I loved, but we couldn't serve that!

Rimma: I feel that right now. I mean now that you're saying it, I have that feeling. I remember that sleepover. It was a Friday night and my mother was going to have hamburgers. My mother liked to make her hamburgers with mushrooms inside, and that was weird, ground meat with mushrooms inside. And that feeling that the food is not going to be right. My parents are going to be weird. Things are going to be different.

Margarita: I came here when I was a year and a half, so I pretty much should have grown up American, but all my parents' friends at the time were Russian-Jewish. I had this little community of friends who were all Russian. I went to school and I realized that I didn't understand what the teacher was saying. For the first month and a half when I talked to her I called her "lady" [*laughter*]—in Russian, because I didn't speak a word of English. Luckily I was in Queens, and it was a public school and I kind of looked around and—I wasn't the only one who was different. I was just different in my own way. There were a lot of immigrant kids. Many of the students did not understand English and had no idea what the teacher was saying. The teacher was amazing, she brought everyone up to speed; she was a very patient and nurturing person.

And then I moved to Long Island; it became more of a Russian issue. Because they thought that I'd just flown in and didn't speak a word of English.

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I remember the sleepover. My mother was going to have hamburgers—with mushrooms inside! My parents were going to be weird.

Rimma Kaminer is a computer systems administrator at Columbia University. This fall she starts a Masters program in Urban Planning at Columbia. She lives in Brooklyn with her partner and two long-haired cats. In 1980, when she was six years old, Rimma emigrated from Moldova with her parents.

Inna: They probably thought that you took a boat.

Margarita: Yes, and that's where I learned English, because I had so much time on the boat to study!

Inna: Someone asked me once if I had to climb a wall, if I had to sneak out, if I came through Ellis Island. [*Laughter.*]

Margarita: Once I picked up the language, every student that came in from the former Soviet Union was told to sit next to me, and I became the interpreter. And I was supposed to both keep up with my studies and interpret. I never thought that the people I helped were actually very grateful. It took me a while to understand that it was because they were embarrassed, and didn't want to be in the position of getting extra help. They were clearly smart, but there they were, getting help from another student. And then, later, I always had this very odd relationship with them, because I was the one who held their hand for the first couple of months, and it was not something they were proud of. For me, it was great to be able to help someone.

Russian-Jewish & Queer

Rimma: New York has this lesbian and gay community center. And they have groups for *everything, everyone*. There's a gay stuttering group. There are transsexual volleyball groups. Everything you could imagine. And I went and checked online to see if they had any Russian groups, and they don't have any. And I said this to someone and they said, why don't you start one?

Inna: Who else would be in the group?

Rimma: I don't know who would be in the group but it wouldn't be me! [*Laughter.*]

Rimma: So anyway, I did this search. I didn't find anything, then someone said you should start it, and I realized that I couldn't start it. Because I felt like I couldn't possibly identify with whoever might come, because I'm so Americanized. And I heard that there was a group in San Francisco organized by an American who had some sort of —affection—for Russian Jewish lesbians [*laughter*]. I felt a little weird about it so I never followed up.

On Jewish Identity

Inna: For me, the religious part is a bit confused. It has sort of weaved in and out in my life. I went to yeshiva until fourth grade, and that affected me a lot. I learned how to read Hebrew—I'm never going to forget how to read Hebrew—and I can go to services in Hebrew. I went to a sort of typical American Hebrew school in New Jersey, a sort of mainstream Conservative egalitarian synagogue and got bat mitzvahed. There weren't a lot of Russians there. But at that age, I really wanted it. I really wanted the bat mitzvah, I wanted that experience. But then after my bat mitzvah I stopped, and then in law school I started doing Jewish stuff again. When I go to services, I really want to go to a Conservative egalitarian service; I want those kind of songs, I want the service to be that way. And then sometimes I go to this Russian synagogue in Fair Lawn with my parents, just because they sometimes go there on high holidays, and I'll go with them because I spend the holidays with them. And it's a Lubavitch synagogue. I don't like that the women are separated. This year I actually got my parents to come to a Conservative egalitarian service. I identify in many other ways, too. Israel, and culturally, and because of my background, I don't think that could ever go away. I mean, my life is like it is because I'm Jewish. We wouldn't have left the Soviet Union if I weren't Jewish. I have no clue what my life would have been otherwise.

Anna: I had several years of Jewish education and it definitely made a deep impact on me. But I think—I don't actually know that much. And when I go to services I can read texts and I remember some of the melodies, but I think I make up a lot of stuff in conversation with other Jews and pretend to know more than I do know. So I built up in my head the idea of what Judaism is like, and I keep kosher and I go to services, but I don't really know all that much about the laws, the traditions. So I have my own special brand of religious Judaism, which sort of has a heavy social activist component. So for me, it is mostly a religious identity. I have a lot of fights with my parents because they consider themselves 100% Jewish—and yet they don't keep any laws.

Rachel Kranson, *our interviewer, studies Jewish American history at New York University. Before starting her doctoral program, Rachel worked as Assistant Editor at* LILITH.

Rimma: So its like—what does it mean to be Jewish when you've never been to a synagogue? [*Laughter.*] Well, you are Jewish! Absolutely. I absolutely believe it because I lived most of my life that way. Completely Jewish, and almost completely ignorant.

Anna: Right. We used to have arguments because my mother is very defensive about Israel. And I'm pro-Israel, but she [has this] emotional blind spot. So, almost as a reaction against her, I think, I have to bring up the Palestinian point of view, and human rights. So the [Jewish] national identity, for me, almost always comes last. And the traditions—even though I don't know most of them—vaguely, I really like them. And I make up a lot of stuff. It's kind of a handy tool when I talk to my boyfriend—I can make something up and say it's a Russian-Jewish tradition! [*Laughter.*]

Margarita: But going back to the question, I just wanted to say this, because I'm just amazed—and I thank you guys for being so honest, because growing up all the time amongst all these American Jews, I did not get a formal Jewish education and like you, I get mixed up all the time and say it's a Russian Jewish tradition! That kind of combines with the other question—I feel like American Jews have to make a little more effort to be a little more accepting and understanding, because when we came here, we were just trying to get all our bearings. It was definitely a priority to understand our Jewish history, but I think for some of the parents they just wanted their kids just to get into school, to learn the language, to be successful and integrate into society.

Today is my grandfather's birthday. It's been many years since he passed away. But when he came here, he went to synagogue all the time, because he could speak Yiddish. And it was another community outside of just the Russians that he could socialize with. And in honor of the sacrifices that my family made, both recent and generations ago, I could never deny being Jewish. I could never get married in a church. I think if I were Catholic I'd probably be the same way on that side, only because of my family. As an honor to my family, and all the generations that have remained Jewish. I don't think that I would want to be the one to change that. But for me the religious aspects are not as strong, not at this point in my life. I don't practice at all, there are some days I feel guilty other days I don't. Partly, this comes from how I was raised, not particularly observant. Also, I've never been bat mitzvahed. But I would like to someday do it in Israel. I've never been to Israel. I'd like to go. When I can really make it a very meaningful experience.

Rimma: You know I "pass" among American Jews because at some point I was interested enough that now I can go to pretty much any Reform service and I have it memorized. And I like to joke that I go back to the oral tradition of Judaism, when none of us could read, and since I have it all memorized I have a more authentic Judaism! [*Laughter.*] And I can't read Hebrew because I was busy learning English, or busy forgetting Russian, or busy doing other things. And I feel a little sad about it. And it seems like it's too hard, it's too hard to know everything, to integrate everything. There are times when I feel really invested in my Judaism. Not in my Jewishness—I mean, that's always going to be there, that's my ethnicity, that's just me. But I mean like the spiritual aspects. And then I want to go study, I want to learn everything, I want to be a Reconstructionist, I want to—you know, I want it all. I can't have it all. But I wish that I'd had the years of day school so that I could say I know this much, and I know what I do and don't like. But because I chose it as an adult, maybe I feel freer to go my own way.

Olga: I went to Jewish day schools for two years, and that had a big effect on me. And then for a while after that I would try to be kosher, which didn't really work as a 14-year-old in a non-kosher home [*laughter*]. I find that I'm also more comfortable at Conservative services, I guess because those were the kind that I went to most often. But then at the same time, I don't live a lifestyle that's consistent with being a Conservative Jew. I don't keep kosher, I live with a man that I'm not married to…[*laughter*]. All these things. And I don't feel particularly bad about them. So I guess I don't know exactly where I fit in on that continuum.

Anna: When I choose to identify myself religiously or spiritually I'd say I'm Jewish, and not Jewish-American. Because for me that's an entity that I don't really belong to, although my actual religion is a big part of my life.

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Class, and Career Choices

Lara: Now, very recently, I discovered a very unpleasant but powerful identity. I think I'm Soviet. I have a deeply Soviet mentality. I didn't know that it influenced me so greatly until lately, when I realized I think like a typical Soviet person. I used to think that poor people were good and virtuous and rich people were evil. And part of me can't do anything about it. I feel uncomfortable when somebody describes a luxurious lifestyle. And I just can't make myself order about service personnel. I can't ask a waiter to change a plate; I won't have it changed. I just can't do it. I didn't expect that upbringing to influence me so much.

Inna: Probably, technically, I'm upper class—although I haven't been working long enough to really feel like that yet. Although I suppose that it's true.

Rimma: You say that as I'm embracing my downward mobility. [*Laughter.*]

Inna: Well, I'm proud of it, but sometimes it's sort of strange to think that about myself because I didn't necessarily grow up that way. Or maybe it was a very steep climb up, so I feel like I don't relate to people who had an upper-class upbringing. But then when I think about what my reality was, well, I never felt financially deprived of anything. Maybe that's a testament to my parents making me feel like that or to them actually doing well very quickly.

Rimma: Perhaps that's also part of growing up in the suburbs. You know, when we first got here and we lived in Brooklyn, it was in a very small apartment—well not very small, it was a one-bedroom apartment, it might be perfect for me now! [*Laughter.*] But my father felt very constrained by living in the city, he had to get to the suburbs. And it was definitely an economic achievement.

Margarita: I think that this steep climb—steep and very fast—is the one thing that can kind of tie it [the immigration experience] together, definitely universal. You rarely hear of anyone who came here, had to be on welfare, and has remained on welfare for ten years.

Rimma: Right, like they were on welfare while they were studying to pass their medical boards here. Now they are doctors. They live on Manhattan Beach in their enormous houses. They have become incredibly successful. [*Laughter.*]

Margarita: See what some of the kids of the Russian immigrants are doing, career-wise. You see a lot of doctors, techies, lawyers. Few are social activists or doing not-for-profit work. You know I thought about not-for-profit, and I'm just thinking about the conversation that I'm going to have to have with my parents. And just their minds blowing up, being like, what do you mean? What's the point of that?

Rimma: We have a friend who went to high school with us, who is Russian Jewish, who had an amazing career in advertising. Advertising, profiled in some I-don't-know-what magazine, she was doing incredibly well, making a lot of money. And then she told her mother that she wanted to go back to graduate school for a PhD. in Anthropology. Her mother said, "What? Why would you give up your career?" Now she's in Moscow doing her field study. [I'm familiar with] that feeling that you were just talking about—that you're going to give up a solid career to go to school to do something that might not result in a stable life.

Margarita: And its funny, because I always thought that a main goal of coming here was for us to "make it," but I've always thought that the next step of "making it" was that you had a choice. And that you could actually say, I absolutely love this and I want to do this, regardless of whether or not it is the most socially acceptable and lucrative profession.

Inna: I suspect that there are not going to be a lot of people in non-profit in this generation. But I suspect that in the next generation there will, and you're not going to be able to pick them out from any other Americans.

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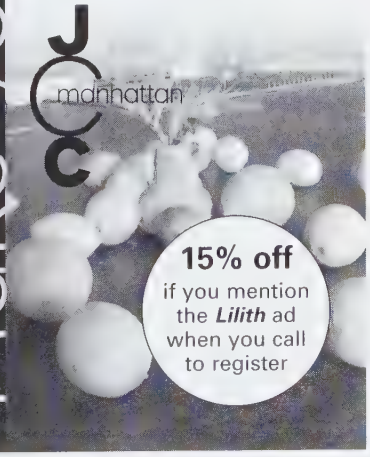

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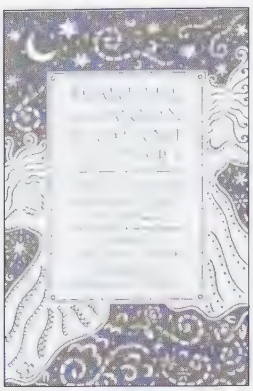
Opening the Yiddish Pantheon to Women



What kept these women from writing more?

In her 1991 collection *Metaphor and Memory*, Cynthia Ozick speaks of the Yiddish triumvirate of Mendele Mokher Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, and Y. L. Peretz (the *classikers*), which was the invention of Sholem Aleichem himself, a myth that remains with us today.

Beautiful as the Moon, Radiant as the Stars: Jewish Women in Yiddish Stories—An Anthology, **edited by Sandra Bark with an introduction** by **Francine Prose** (Warner Books, $14.95) opens up this pantheon to women—many of whose names we don't know. Unhappily, the authors' biographies here don't always reveal much about the conditions they endured or what kept them from writing more. But the stories by and about women provide clues.

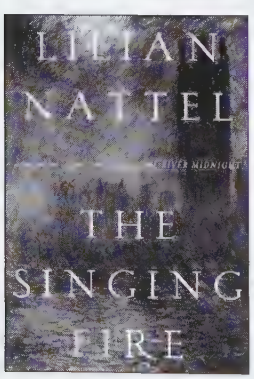
The women in many of these stories bring to mind poet Irena Klepfisz's term *kursistke*—"a woman who studied (took courses) and prepared herself for revolution"—but with a difference. Here the kursistke is often self-taught, has to fight for the right to read and to study; "revolution" usually remains internal or short-lived, as the following examples indicate.

The first-person narrator of Dvora Baron's heartbreaking "Kaddish" is a worthy, albeit secret, student; nonetheless, she is not allowed to say kaddish at the death of her grandfather, who was impressed by her fine mind but declared, "if only you were a boy." In Helen Londynski's memoir "The Four-Ruble War," Chayele's mother tells her young girls need not study: "The more she learns, the less she is worth." Similarly, Bella, in Celia Dropkin's "Bella Fell in Love," comes to the city to study but returns home, having found little encouragement for her ambitions. And Emma in Yente Serdatzky's "Rosh Hashanah," who left Russia rather than accept a Siberian exile for her politics, loses her "idealistic strivings" in America, where "all was crude and crass," where she finds neither "the holy, poetic stillness of the shtetl" nor "the exhilaration of the struggle."

None of the stories deals directly with Israel or the Holocaust, although Blume Lempel's first person narrative, "Scenes on a Bare Canvas" (beautifully translated by Sheva Zucker), takes place during the narrator's first trip to Israel as she attempts to deal with her guilt as a survivor: "Whenever I chance to meet a person who escaped from the abyss, I look at him with fear and expectation, lest I uncover something beyond my comprehension." She attends the funeral of Zosie, a young woman from her hometown, who, the narrator imagines, "roams from camp to camp together with other wind-driven wanderers." Understanding that she and Zosie have much in common, the narrator also comes to see Zosie as "the crow that pecks at my conscience."

While Bark's selections, especially those by Dvora Baron, Rachel Korn, Fradel Schtok, Yente Serdatsky, Shira Gorshman, Blume Lempel, Kadya Molodowsky, and Esther Singer Kreitman, are a pleasure to read, one may wonder why the editor included stories by many men, implying that there weren't enough good women writers.

—Julia Wolf Mazow



Jewish Heroines in Victorian London

In her acclaimed first novel, *The River Midnight*, Toronto author **Lilian Nattel** delineated the complex relationships among the men and women living in a Polish village at the turn of the last century. Her second work of fiction is even more ambitious, spanning 25 years in the same era. *The Singing Fire* explores gender, class and ethnicity in the lives of two Jewish female immigrants who reinvent themselves soon after landing in England.

From the outset, the heroines strive to eradicate the past, but for different reasons. Still in her teens, Nechamah leaves Poland to escape a circumscribed life and the suffocating influence of her sisters; however, after arriving in the East End of London, she inadvertently turns to prostitution. The other protagonist, Emilia, is the daughter of a wealthy, but what we would now term dysfunctional, family. Masquerading as a young widow, she flees Russia to avoid her father's wrath after becoming pregnant with her tutor's child. With few options available, Emilia uses her beauty to entrench her position in the British upper class. By contrast, Nechamah relies on her wits and audacity for survival. The women remain strangers for the first hundred pages until they meet when Nechamah rescues Emilia. From that point on, their lives become inextricably bound by Emilia's daughter, Gittel.

The novel examines the values of two characters from different levels of society. Ironically, Emilia leads an emotionally bankrupt existence because of her choices, while Nehama's life, despite the poverty, is arguably more fulfilling. In Nattel's words, "she had everything and nothing. A home…a place in the world, all of it secondhand like the shabby goods in the rag market."

While Nattel's first book hinted at the spirit world, the supernatural makes a more palpable appearance in *The Singing Fire* (Knopf Canada, $35). The ghost of her father's first wife presides over the significant events in Emilia's life. Nehama often hears the voice of her grandmother, whose strength of character and love of singing provide a role model and source of encouragement in her moments of adversity.

Nattel convincingly portrays London during the Victorian era, from the sights, sounds and smells in the streets to the distinctive cadences of the language. She also incorporates plot elements about the needle trade, the literary community and the Yiddish theater. Readers, especially those with an interest in social history and immigration, certainly won't be disappointed.

—*Bev Greenberg*

Why Family Issues Are Private Issues

Imagine what our Jewish communities would be like if….working parents could volunteer at their children's Hebrew schools or day schools during the week….if rabbis didn't have to be on call 24/7, and could take time to volunteer in their children's schools, or programs for home-bound Jewish elderly….if Federation executives were given a 4-hour workday once a month, so that they could spend the rest of the day volunteering at one of the social service agencies their organization supports….if your workplace partnered with your local JCC and your child's school to provide a safe, affordable, after-school program, complete with transportation, so that you wouldn't have to worry about what your kids were up to in the hours between when they finish school and you get home from work. What if your Jewish organizational employer offered on-site daycare, as the Ramaz School, a Modern Orthodox day school in Manhattan, recently did? What if your synagogue's sisterhood helped to set up a community-based childcare network and referral system? As Herzl said, "*im tirtzu, ayn zo agada*—if you will it, it is no dream."

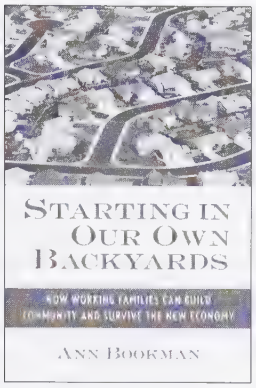
All these "radical" ideas came to me as I was reading *Starting in Our Own Backyards: How Working Families Can Build Community and Survive the New Economy* by **Ann Bookman**, (Routledge, $26).

Bookman's fascinating study of the need to integrate "community" into our lives. Bookman argues that community participation is an important factor which has been left out of discussions on work-life balance policies and studies. Her ideas will resonate with many Jews, for whom being Jewish *is* about community, whatever your family constellation or religious persuasion.

Bookman, a trained anthropologist and currently the executive director of the MIT Workplace Center at the Sloan School of Management, used participant observation and interviews with 40 workers at three biotech companies in the Boston area to paint a picture of families of different class levels struggling to find time. Out of days filled with long commutes, long work-hours, and family caretaking, these parents also want to connect to their communities. Whether through local government, school boards, community service projects, participating in religious organizations, or creating informal childcare networks, these families want to give back to their communities but are desperately strapped for time.

Most of the biotech workers could not negotiate any flexible work arrangements with their employers. Yet even when there *are* work-life policies at companies, according to Bookman these most often reflect and reproduce "the traditional division between the public world of work and the private world of family." These policies do not address redesigning how work is organized and alternative work arrangements that might help families who have caregiving responsibilities. They also don't facilitate employee involvement in community-based support programs or volunteer opportunities.

Part of the problem, according to Bookman, is an American cultural assumption that family issues are private issues, which should only to be addressed by private solutions, not public or community-based resolutions (and yes, this is more *American* than North American—Canada has a paid family leave system, and as a Canadian now living in the U.S., don't get me started….). This antiquated notion not only puts unbearable pressure on families overburdened with economic



For many Jews, being Jewish *is* about community—whatever your religious persuasion.

Our Reviewers

Bev Greenberg is a Canadian writer living in Winnipeg.

Julia Wolf Mazow, student of Yiddish language and literature, compiled and edited *The Woman Who Lost Her Names: Selected Writings of American Jewish Women.*

Karen Propp is the author of two memoirs, *In Sickness & In Health: A Love Story* and *The Pregnancy Project: Encounters with Reproductive Therapy.* She lives in Cambridge, MA.

Susan Sapiro holds an MA in Gender Studies. She researches gender issues in contemporary Judaism.

uncertainties and caretaking responsibilities, but it's also based on a (Victorian) gendered notion of society—Private Domestic Woman and Public Economic Man.

The other problem is also structural. As Jewish women (and men, hopefully) continue to struggle with balancing paid work, family work, and community work, it's important to realize that despite feminism's gains, all of us are still laboring in male world (world based on male norms). Contemporary career paths are based on an outmoded and gendered model—that of the "ideal worker," an unencumbered man who has a wife at home to take care of all the domestic responsibilities while he devotes all of his time to his work. The intense professional demands at the beginning of one's career don't usually allow for time for family care and community involvement. While those two realms used to be women's only focus, now most mothers are in the paid workforce, but organizations have not yet caught up to this new reality and continue to structure jobs and career development as though their workers had no other responsibilities other than paid work.

In chapters on childcare, parental involvement in education, community political participation and faith communities, Bookman argues that the new reality of working parents demands an expansion of social responsibility for families and community institutions. The solutions to the current crisis of care need to come from partnerships among the major societal institutions—employers, unions, government, religious organizations and community groups.

Bookman's chapter "Not By Bread Alone" will resonate with many LILITH readers. Using the example of the adult bat mitzvah ceremony of one of the biotech employees in her study, Bookman explores how religious institutions can help individuals and working families cope with the many demands in their lives, by both fostering community connections and giving spiritual sustenance. Not surprisingly, women in Bookman's study take on most of the responsibility for their families' religious participation, similar to the gendered division of labor around childcare and involvement in school activities. (This trend has also been observed in studies of Jewish observance and intermarried families.) The female biotech workers or wives participate in women's prayer and study groups at their houses of worship, choose religious education options for their children (and sometimes teach in them), and serve on committees or boards at their institutions. Despite the added time commitment to an already complex schedule for working parents, these women find their participation in their religious communities to be very meaningful and supportive. Religious institutions can also serve as voices for issues crucial to working families, such as public and private support for community institutions and family-friendly policies. Bookman also gives a personal example how community involvement (and women's support) can strengthen people to deal with the professional and personal challenges in their lives: in the acknowledgements she thanks her faith community at Temple Israel, members of her Women's Study Group (including Jewish women's history professor Joyce Antler) and her "incomparable rabbi, Elaine Zecher."

Bookman concludes that work-family and community issues always seem to come back to gender roles and expectations. She notes that among her biotech employees, the women saw making connections with others (the relational stuff we're supposedly good at) as part of their "job." Whether it involved participating in parents' committees of a childcare program, organizing carpools, or volunteering to teach religious schools, both professional and stay-at-home mothers engaged in these activities with others. On the contrary, the working fathers in the group had limited family and community involvement. Some men transported their children to and from childcare,

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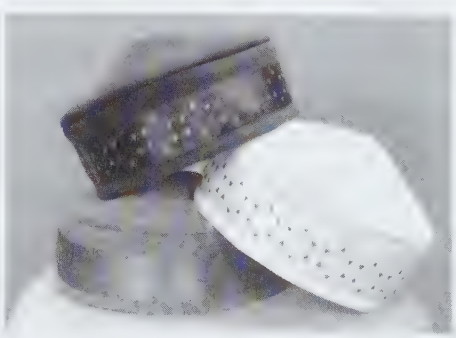

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coached sports teams, attended school events, and often fed and bathed their children. Yet, Bookman emphasizes, the working mothers and wives in her study did all that and more. They did the unrecognized "relational" work, that of building and maintaining community-based support networks. But, Bookman asks, "...is it fair to ask working women today, already doing two jobs, to do another unpaid job—a 'third shift'?" Her answer, not surprisingly, is that men need to share the responsibility of community involvement, in addition to childcare and housework, *just as women always have*.

Despite the current administration's rhetoric of "family values," it's painfully clear that the United States does *not* value family work. The U.S. is one of the few industrialized countries in the world without either paid maternity leave or paid parental leave. Jews and Jewish institutions should be at the forefront of lobbying for government and business support for family care and community involvement. As Bookman shows, new ways of organizing paid work and "care-work" not only make "business sense," they also reflect Jewish and feminist values—shared parenting and family care, rest and reflection, and time to fulfill communal obligations.

—*Susan Sapiro*

"Illness Memoirs" ...from Women Who've Survived

When writing about my experience of my husband's rather devastating prostate cancer surgery, various publishing people pressed me to "write a happy ending."

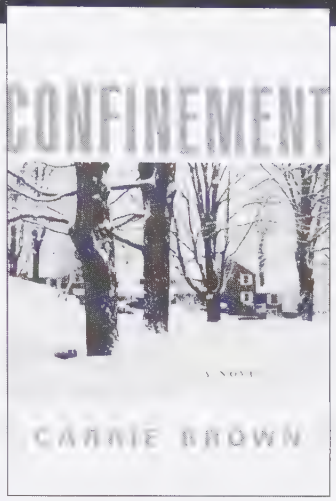
One editor pleaded, "Please don't get divorced." (I'd voiced no such intentions.) Of course, I was free to tell my story however I pleased, but I was advised to give readers the message that I'd triumphed over adversity.

What is it about Americans and happy endings? Hollywood, made-for-television movies, disabled celebrities—it's one thing when the media broadcasts victory against seemingly unbeatable odds, but the literary memoir is a form where tragedy could be given respect.

Perhaps the rigid requirements of the ending propelled these writers—good people to whom bad things happened—to enhance their storytelling with stylistic inventions.

Suzy Becker (*Everything I Need to Know I Learned From My Cat*) had seizures for years; at age 30, testing discovered a brain tumor. Surgery followed, and then recovery and rehabilitation, most notably rather extensive speech therapy. In her new book, *I Had Brain Surgery, What's Your Excuse?* (Workman, $19.95) Becker once again treats us to her whimsical cartoons (nearly 400), an imaginary medical superheroine named Augusta, bar graphs to measure such things as "The Regeneration of Hope," "Disappointment Timeline," and "Good Patienthood." In addition to her many visits to doctors, we hear about relationships with her girlfriend Karen, family and friends, and most of all, about the emotional odyssey that invariably accompanies serious illness. But Becker triumphs. She completes Ride FAR, an

Summer Reading



Confinement
a novel by
Carrie Brown

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All-Night Party
The Women of Bohemian Greenwich Village and Harlem, 1913–1930
by Andrea Barnet

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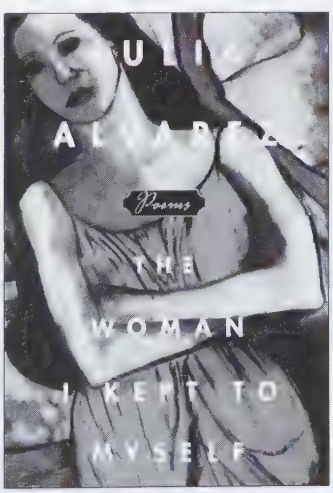

The Woman I Kept to Myself
poems by Julia Alvarez

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—*The Dallas Morning News*

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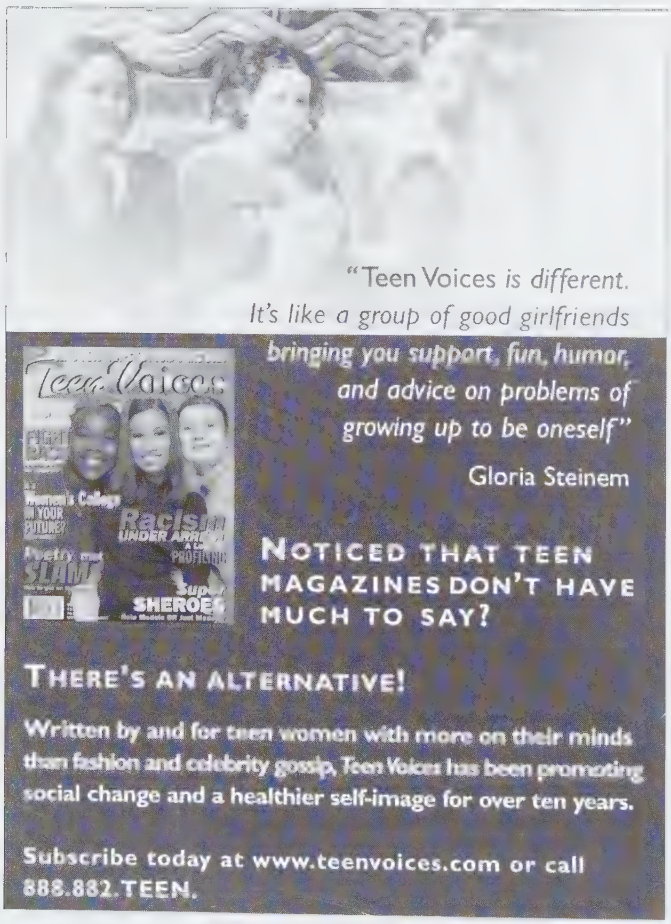
AIDS bike-a-thon. Only months after brain surgery, she wins a Bunting Fellowship at Radcliffe College, where she again proves victorious with a colloquium on—surprise—the first 20 pages of what became this book.

Canadian feminist filmmaker **Bonnie Sherr Klein**, in *Out of the Blue: One Woman's Story of Stroke, Love, and Survival* in collaboration with **Persimmon Blackbridge** (Wildcat Canyon Press, 1998), narrates her transformation from activist artist ("Not A Love Story: A Film About Pornography"), mother of two, loving doctor's wife—to an invalid felled by a stroke. Seven years later, when being better means getting around on "Gladys," a motorized scooter, and working for disability rights, Klein begins to write her story. The result is a book made not only from her retrospective chronicle, but from a collage of interesting sources: snippets of her diary kept during serious illness, medical reports, short interviews with her doctors, husband, teenaged kids and close friends, all of whom relate their experience of watching Klein struggle to get well. And yes, tragedy has taught her many things, among them, to slow down and to ask others for help, thereby enabling a *mitzvah*.

Life Inside: A Memoir by **Mindy Lewis** (Washington Square Press, $24) is Lewis' chronicle of her many years spent overcoming calamity. In 1967, Lewis, age 15, was skipping school, smoking pot, and listening to Dylan. Her father took off for California, and her mother, unable to cope with her moody, rebellious daughter, signed her over to state custody, who then sent her to the New York State Psychiatric Institute. Lewis remained there for over two years. (What *is* it about Jewish mothers and their artistic daughters?) Most tragic, Lewis was misdiagnosed as having schizophrenia, a not uncommon mistake for the psychiatric profession in the 1960s and 1970s. Lewis' book contains testimony from a therapist who retrospectively diagnoses her as having had only "adolescent rebellion and despair… turbulent emotions…." Indeed, part of her triumph is to visit the ward 33 years after her stay. An adult now, the place no longer intimidates. She can forgive her doctors and is surprised to connect to feelings of intense joy. But that does not reverse the fact that a difficult, even troubled coming-of-age for Lewis was made enormously more complicated by her forced hospitalization. "Ultimately, recovering from incarceration and sorting through its myths has been the greatest education of my life," she says near the end of her moving story.

To write and publish an illness memoir is itself a triumph over adversity. These are the survivors, the ones who came back to tell us their stories. Unwritten and truly tragic are the stories of the many more who did not.

—Karen Propp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Different Faces, Different Voices—All of Them Jewish

The obvious reason for a celebration of multiracial, multi-ethnic Jews is the opportunity it gives all Jews to appreciate a lush array of literature, music, customs, and food from the many regions Jews come from. Yet a more ominous reason lurks behind the shadows of this glorified collective celebration of diversity—that is, Jews have been historically demonized, exiled, and massacred. Jews literally need each other, or, in words of editor Karen Primack, "History teaches us that a Jew never knows...where that help might come from."

The founder of the organization Kulanu ("all of us") which is devoted to discovering and supporting Jewish life around the world. **Karen Primack** has compiled *Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity* (Kulanu, Inc., $15; available from Kulanu.org). This is a wide-ranging anthology of stories, songs, and poetry representing Sephardi, Ashkenazi, and Mizrachi Jews, Jews of Africa and Asia, converted Jews, and Jews of the modern Israel.

In a striking piece on the Jews of Spain, Robin Becker writes, "I love the sad proud history of expulsion and wandering, the Moorish synagogue walled in the Venetian ghetto, persistence of study and text." Other passages speak to childhood revelations. Eva R. Yelloz recalls the day her mother slapped her face when she unknowingly spoke of her fellow Mizrahi (Jew from the Middle East or North Africa) classmate as a *Frenk Parech*, meaning pockmarked by the facial scars from a bacteria-borne illness that struck the people of North Africa and the Middle East. One piece translates the Passover four questions into the Luganda language, while another finds its voice as a Ladino bedtime prayer for children. Some of the passages work to educate. Writes Yitzchak Kerem, "Most of the details of the Sephardic experience in the Holocaust are unknown in the Jewish world." Margie Klein, who set out to teach Jewish subjects to the Jewish Sefwi Wiawso community in Ghana, West Africa, found that in the midst of singing praises for the corn growing and the bearing of beautiful children, the Jewish Ghanaian farmers had "a whole lot more to teach me about Judaism than I had to give them." One writer, a woman with a Jewish father and Korean mother, recalls the spicy cabbage *kimchee* which her mother would place on the seder place each Passover instead of maror.

The material Primack has drawn in reveals poignant moments in which families are exiled from homelands or children discover the Jewish roots their parents have kept hidden for so many years. These diversity stories give us a rich narrative about the union of culture and religion, illuminating the many underreported ways Jews live around the world.

—*Ilana Kramer*

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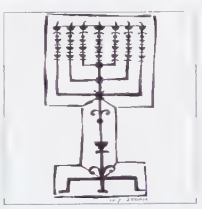
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book excerpt

Nessa Rapoport *uses a days-long boat trip with her family to their ancestral Ontario vacation cottage (recounted in* **House on the River: A Summer Journey**, *Harmony Books, 2004) to uncover the subtle forces that shaped her as a writer, a mother, an observant Jew.*

After years of sublimation, of socializing myself not to read at the table or in front of people who deserve my entire attention, I have returned to my first passion with the same shocked intensity with which others have affairs or quit their jobs. Lying in bed, propped on my elbows before a library book with its captivating, unstylish cover, I resume my vocation.

"What are you reading?" my grandmother used to inquire in exactly the tone I once heard a woman at a wedding reception ask seductively of another, "What are you drinking?"

…How can I describe the sovereignty of print over me, how I stood in the bookstore until I had devoured Nancy Drew's exploits, the latest in a series my mother would not buy—although she conceded that in her youth she had loved them as much as I. I coveted the volumes I had not read as if they were a drug, pressuring classmates whose parents were more obliging to lend me their brand-new copies, which I would return the next day after too little sleep.

To open a book and be seduced by the first page, to weep over books until the print danced, to shiver in the backyard through the last daylight because the thought of stopping, even to go inside, could not be borne, to offend my friends when I read their cereal boxes instead of playing—all this was paradise.

Among the most disquieting aspects of new motherhood was the recognition that I could not pick up a book to change my mood or flee my circumstances. I had not realized, until I had babies, how much I relied on reading. Now I experienced my yearning as a curse, for my book beckoned always, even when the children needed me. Twice I can remember reading a book from beginning to end, perched on my bedside uncomfortably, because I had intended simply to taste the writer's style, while hours passed and I became aware, vaguely, that the children were wild with impatience.

When as a child I told my mother that she was using her "hmm" voice as she read while I was trying to talk to her, she laughed and said she remembered well how she sought her mother's attention and was met with the same "hmm."

"I'm the third generation of 'hmm,'" I would say to Jake, who was not amused. One of my sisters defined motherhood as an attempt to pacify the children so that you could finish your book. When I repeat this *bon mot* to women who do not share my lust for the transport only a book can offer, they look horrified. But women who are readers offer a smile of complicity. I even allocate a role for God, who, I believe, sends me the book that perfectly matches my need when I am desperate. ●

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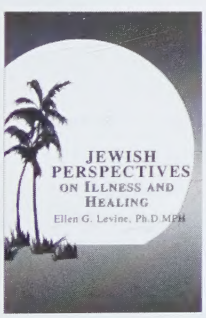

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SACRED OBJECTS

The Torah Scroll is the most sacred object in Judaism. **Aviel Barclay,** scribe, the first known woman *soferet* to be certified in this holy art, has begun her first Sefer Torah. This first woman-scribed Torah scroll will visit many Jewish communities (maybe yours!) To help in the writing of a Sefer Torah is a mitzvah. You can take part, and for your support receive a collectible signed art print or personalized calligraphy by the soferet. *www.womenstorah.org*

WOMEN COUNT

Women must vote! Bring out the voters on election day, November 2, 2004. A community-based national program for citizenship education, "Strive for Five" relies on relationships—via e-mail and personal conversations—to stimulate voter registration for the upcoming United States elections. Each individual agrees to register five new voters, or five voters who are registered but haven't voted, and commits to getting these eligible voters to the voting booth. *(718)284-8054. www.StriveforFive.com*

Women's demographics. The U.S. Census Bureau recently published a new multimedia web page dedicated to women's history month and women's data. The page includes video, audio and charts showing fast facts about women in the U.S.: age, college enrollment, women's occupations and more. Under the theme "A New Era for Working Women," a video features the growing number of women in non-traditional jobs. *www.census.gov/pubinfo/www/multimedia/WomensHistory.html*

Women in Judaism: A Multi-disciplinary Journal, features in its fall 2003 issue: "Changes in the Social Status of Urban Jewish Women in Iraq as the Nineteenth Century Turned," "'The Defense Has Become the Prosecution': Ezrat HaNashim, a Thirteenth-Century Response to Misogyny," and "A Mystery on the Tombstones: 'Women's Commandments' in Early-Modern Askenazi Culture." *www.women-in-judaism.com* or *dina.eylon@utoronto.ca*

HELPING

Do you employ a nanny, housekeeper, or eldercare provider? Do you know someone who does? A campaign for dignity, respect, and recognition for domestic workers aims at putting principles into practice. Learn about Jewish traditions of worker and immigrant justice, historic passage of NYC's first legislation to protect domestic workers' rights, and receive a standard contract from *Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, (212)647-8966 x12; sarahjfrej@igc.org*

Vicarious Motherhood For an upcoming anthology, send short stories related to the mother—nanny/baby-sitter—child relationship—interpreted loosely and/or creatively. Manuscripts or queries to: *Orchid Anthology, PO Box 131457, Ann Arbor, MI 48113-1457.*

A communal plan to respond in a crisis has been developed by the Jewish Health, Healing and Recovery Network, Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. A detailed inventory for synagogues and schools suggests useful categories and organizes information on needs and vulnerabilities and resources and talents of volunteers that can be called upon. Contact *Alisha Goodman, (212)399-2685 x233. www.jhhrn.org*

HEALING

Journey into Light: Courage to Heal, is an exhibit created by artist **Renee Klyczek Nordsrom.** It chronicles the journey from brutal pain to reclaiming safety, joy, beauty and life itself, and highlights the role of art and therapy in healing. Through August 8 at the *Union Street Gallery, Chicago Heights, Illinois, (708) 754-2601. www.unionstreetgallery.org*

Tami Rimon, Israeli singer and cancer survivor's "Talk About Life" is an interactive presentation and concert. She leads an open discussion and uses her singing to empower women, cancer patients and medical staff across Israel and internationally. Included in the program is a documentary film, "Tami." Rimon is available for performances. *tamrimon@inter.net.il*

Jewish survivors of sexual abuse have a new resource in a website created by survivor **Sherri Goldberg,** *www.jewishsurvivorsofsexualabuse.org*

Special needs kids. Where can parents go to find a bar/bat mitzvah training, social outlets and advocacy services for a developmentally disabled youngster? Where can elderly caregivers turn to make provisions for a an adult child? Where to find support groups to assist with the unique demands of helping a child or a teen with disabilities reach full potential? Check out *Special Needs: A Resource Directory* (2003) from *UJA Federation of New York,* see below.

Family Violence, The 2004 Resource Directory from the UJA Federation of New York, lists hotline, crisis intervention services, information and referrals, counseling and mental health, shelters, childrens' services and services for seniors. *(212)980-1000. www.ujafedny.org*

More Than a Thousand Tomorrows is a video showing spouses of people with Alzheimer's speaking candidly about it's impact on intimacy and sexuality (22 minutes). Academy Award-winning documentary **The Personals** follows a group of senior citizens as they rehearse and perform an original play about their own quest for dates through the personal ads (30 minutes). *Fanlight Productions, (800)937-4113. www.fanlight.com*

MAGNOLIAS AND MENORAHS. PEDDLERS, PLANTERS AND POLITICIANS. LOX, BAGELS AND GRITS.

ShalomYAll: Images of Jewish life in the American South is an exhibition of 44 black-and-white photographs by **Bill Aron** with narratives captured in texts by curator and educator **Vicki Reikes Fox**, born in Savannah and raised in Hattiesburg Mississippi. June 7- September 13 at the *Museum of Jewish Heritage, in New York City, (646)437-4200. www.mjhnyc.org*

ALL PHOTOS © BILL ARON

Henrietta Levine's Jewish Kitchen, Pine Bluff, Arkansas. The best chopped liver in the South.

"You want (the recipe) from the very beginning?" The exhibition actually records Henriette Levine's description.

Eva Gottlieb: "I tried to take the numbers off a long time ago. They have also faded a little. I went to a doctor in New York and he said not to take it off. "Eva," he said, "don't do it. You'll regret it for the rest of your life." I was the 51,411th person to enter Auschwitz and that is the number on my arm."

Barbara Edison and Betty Kohn, Congregation Shaarey Zedek, Morgan City, Louisiana. Barbara Edison: "Clay said to me one night, 'I think I ought to take your mother out to dinner and ask her how she feels about us getting married.' ...She said, 'I have something to ask you, but I don't think that I can ask you.' So, they had a couple of more drinks. She finally said, 'Are you circumcised?' He said, 'Yes. Is that all right?' She said, 'Fine. Ya'll can get married.'"

ISRAEL

The Books for Israel Project sends English language books to Israeli public schools where children start studying English in the third grade. **Rena Cohen** and **Jade Bar-Shalom** began this international all-volunteer organization after Israel's national budget for English language books was cut completely in 2002 because of the security situation. *www.edu-negev.gov.il/bs/b4i*

Free Online Coupon Book for Travel to Israel. For significant discounts and bargains on hotels, tours, shopping, meals, and more, these coupons are valid for travel through 2004. *1-888-77-ISRAEL. www.goisrael.com/couponbook*

Hello Peace is a campaign of The Parents' Circle—The Israeli and Palestinian Bereaved Families Forum, encouraging conversations between ordinary Israelis and Palestinians in the hope of enhancing empathy, reducing hatred, and contributing to the possibility that each side will take risks to achieve peace. "We can talk about pain. We can talk about anger. We can talk about hope. We can talk about opportunities. Or we can talk about our family and the kids. But we must stop shooting, and start talking." So far 230,000 Israeli and Palestinians have responded to the campaign and spoken for over 700,000 minutes. Now the campaign has been extended to the United States, where it will be funded by callers, through the 1-900 toll phone system, 70% tax-deductible as a contribution to the Parents' Circle. *www.hellopeace.net*

350 YEARS OF JEWS

The Celebrate 350 website maintains a calendar of all events related to the 350th anniversary of the Jews in America celebrated in 2004. It also contains a useful timeline of American Jewish history, distributes an eNewsletter with up-to-date information and program highlights. *www.celebrate350.org*

LILITH Magazine: The Voice of Jewish Women, our traveling exhibition, is on the road. Just finishing a run at the JCC of Greater Washington, it is coming this summer to resort locations, and then to Temple Beth El in Great Neck NY, from September 27-October 22. On to Houston, Texas, from October 25-December 9, to coincide with its annual Jewish Book Fair. Contact LILITH to find out about other sites where you can visit this remarkable survey of the Jewish women's movement since 1976. *www.lilith.org*

GENDER & JEWISH FOOD

Susan Weidman Schneider will speak on this at a conference "Are We What We Eat? American Jewish Foodways, 1654-2004" sponsored jointly by the Judaic Studies Program of the George Washington University and LILITH magazine, in Washington DC, October 10-11. The conference will include a historic Jewish meal created by cookbook author **Joan Nathan.** *www.gwu.edu/~judaic/350/food_conf.htm*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

I Am an American

by Bessie Teicher
as told, in bits and pieces, through many years,
to her daughter, Pearl Manne

Bessie Kaltman
(later Teicher), 1917.

Sailing across the sea, we saw the lights of a city in the distant horizon. I started crying both from happiness and worry. Would I ever see my family again? I had promised them that I would get work, save money and bring them all to America. America had promised us an escape from the violence and pogroms where Jews were robbed, beaten, raped and killed.

My baggage consisted of a suitcase and a sack with my featherbed, from which I never parted. (Many years later my featherbed was converted several times. The feathers were emptied out from ticking, put into a tub of soapy water, dried in the sun, and made into pillows.)

Steerage waited a long time until the first- and second-class passengers got off the boat. People were waving and calling out names, but I didn't recognize anyone. Several of my aunts (whom I had not seen for 10 years) finally found me and almost immediately impressed upon me the most important order of business: how not to be a "greenhorn." I paid strict attention. Then I was told I could not stay with any of them. But my uncle had just become a widower with six children. This would be just the place for me. I could become adjusted to American life and help my uncle with the children. Then they took me to the public baths and introduced me to new fruits and vegetables.

I went to my uncle's apartment very reluctantly. My uncle's apartment building was dark, dirty and hot, with only one toilet per floor that was shared by everyone. In the kitchen, there was a washtub that was used as a bathtub and for washing clothes. My uncle was very polite to me, but my heart sank when I realized that I was to be the housekeeper, cook and laundress, and the one who prepared the wild children and sent them off to school. My only comfort was when I went to bed and wrapped myself in my featherbed and cried myself to sleep. I realized I would not be able to send any money back to Europe to bring my family to the goldene medineh. I wrote to my Aunt Henya in Newark and begged her to take me. As I was leaving my uncle's house, I had to go though an argument with the uncle because he did not want me want me to take my featherbed.

In Newark, I got a job in a cigar factory and met young women. We worked long and hard, but there was laughter and we became friends. Aunt Henya's daughter, though, was getting married, and they needed the room that I took up in the apartment. I moved back to New York's East Side to share a room with another girl.

"How long does it take to become an American citizen?" I kept asking and asking, to anyone who would listen. "How long does it take?" I read street signs and store signs, determined to learn with fluency the language of my adopted land. I attended night school and became interested in political and intellectual subjects, all while working a ten-and-a-half-hour day.

There was an influenza epidemic and I was laid up for three weeks. While in bed, I thought of the sweet air of the forest where I played as a child. By the time I recovered, though, it was spring in New York, with bright sunny skies and children playing in the streets.

My group of friends at that time all came from the same town I did—Nemirov, in the Ukraine—and we were united in the thought that we must help each other. We formed an organization that provided its members with insurance benefits, services of a doctor, and burial plots. Our first official meeting, we decided, would be a masquerade ball. The lady with the most original costume would win a prize. I tried very hard to think of a costume that would bring the audience to its feet. I worked on it for weeks.

The ballroom was overflowing, the band was very loud, blowing on their horns and scratching their violins. The crowd danced the mazurka energetically on the wooden floor. Then the music stopped, and only the drums beat slowly as the young women in costumes started across the stage.

The audience applauded for every one of us, but when I marched across the stage in my American flag dress—holding a flag above my head, too—they rose up from their seats and roared and applauded, and they started to sing "America the Beautiful."

"I am an American," I shouted from the stage. "Long live America!"

1-888-2-LILITH